

Jupiter Buys a Trunk

IT ALL STARTED because Jupiter Jones read the newspaper.

The Three Investigators—Jupiter, Pete Crenshaw, and Bob Andrews—were taking it easy back in Jupe's workshop section of The Jones Salvage Yard. Bob was writing up some notes on their last case. Pete was just enjoying the California morning sunshine. And Jupiter was reading the paper.

Presently he looked up from its pages.

"Has either of you ever been to an auction?" he asked.

Bob said no. Pete shook his head.

"Neither have I," Jupiter said. "The paper says there's an auction this morning at the Davis Auction Company in Hollywood. They'll be auctioning off to the highest bidder unclaimed luggage from a number of hotels. The paper says there are trunks and suitcases with unknown contents, left behind by people who moved, or couldn't pay their bill, or who just forgot to call for them. I think it might be interesting to visit an auction."

"Why?" Pete asked. "I don't need a suitcase full of somebody's old clothes."

"Neither do I," Bob said. "Let's go swimming."

"We should seek out new experiences," Jupiter

A Short Preview

WELCOME, MYSTERY LOVERS! We are gathered together again for another stimulating case of The Three Investigators, whose official motto is "We Investigate Anything". If they had known what they were getting into when they tackled the curious case of the talking skull they might have changed their motto.

Be that as it may, they find themselves this time in a mix-up of mystery and danger which leads them from one perplexing enigma to another until—but I am not a blabbermouth. I promised faithfully not to tell too much, and I shall keep my promise.

Indeed, I shall only say that The Three Investigators are Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw, and Bob Andrews, who all make their home in Rocky Beach, a small municipality in California a few miles from Hollywood. Their Headquarters is a mobile home trailer in The Jones Salvage Yard, a super junkyard owned by Jupiter's aunt and uncle, Mr and Mrs Titus Jones.

The boys make an excellent team. Jupiter has a quick mind and is adept at deductions. Pete is less intellectual but sturdy and courageous. Bob is somewhat studious and an excellent researcher. Together they have solved some very intriguing mysteries indeed.

Which is all I shall say at this time, for I know you are eager to dispense with this preview and get to the main feature.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

The Three Investigators
in

The Screaming Clock

The Moaning Cave

The Talking Skull

by Robert Arthur

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**The Three Investigators
in**

**THE SCREAMING
CLOCK**

A Few Words From Alfred Hitchcock

Greetings and salutations! It is a pleasure to have you join me for another adventure with that remarkable trio of lads who call themselves The Three Investigators. This time a most unusual screaming clock leads them into a tangled web of clues, mystery and excitement.

I imagine that you have already met The Three Investigators and know that they are Jupiter Jones, Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw, all of Rocky Beach, California, a small community on the shores of the Pacific not far from Hollywood. But just in case this is your first meeting with the three, let me add that they make their Headquarters in a mobile home trailer cleverly hidden from sight in The Jones Salvage Yard. This fabulous junkyard is owned by Jupiter's aunt and uncle, for whom the trio work to earn spending money when they are not busy with their investigations.

Enough of introductions. On with the case! The clock is about to scream!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

The Clock Screams

THE CLOCK SCREAMED.

It was the scream of a woman in mortal terror. It started at a low pitch, then went higher and higher until it hurt Jupiter's ears. A shiver ran down his back. It was the most terrifying sound he had ever heard.

And yet it was just an old-fashioned electric alarm clock. Jupiter had merely plugged it in to see if it would run. The next thing he knew it was screaming at him.

Jupiter grabbed the clock's electric cord and pulled it out of the socket. The scream stopped. Jupiter let out his breath with a gasp of relief. The sound of a clock screaming like a woman had been rather unnerving.

Running feet sounded behind him. Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw, who had been working in the front part of The Jones Salvage Yard, skidded to a stop beside him.

"Golly, what was that?" Bob asked.

"Are you hurt, Jupe?" Pete asked anxiously.

Jupiter shook his head.

"Listen," he said. "I want you to hear something rather unusual."

He plugged in the clock again, and once more the terrifying scream filled the air. He pulled out the plug and the scream stopped instantly.

"Wow!" Pete said. "A clock that screams, and he calls it *rather* unusual!"

"I wonder what he'd say if it grew wings and flew away?" Bob grinned. "Maybe then he'd say it was *quite* unusual. As far as I'm concerned a screaming clock is almost the most unusual thing I've ever bumped into."

Jupiter ignored their friendly sarcasm. He was turning the clock over in his hands, studying it. Then he said, in a tone of satisfaction, "Ah!"

"Ah, what?" Pete demanded.

"The alarm lever is at *On*," Jupiter told them. "I'll shut it off and plug the clock in again."

He did this and the clock began to purr softly. It made no other sound.

"Now let's see what happens." Jupiter flipped the alarm lever to *On*. Instantly the clock screamed again. Jupiter quickly switched it off.

"Well," he said, "we've solved the first part of the mystery. The clock screams instead of ringing an alarm."

"What mystery?" Pete demanded. "What mystery have we solved the first part of?"

Jupe means a screaming clock is certainly a

mystery," Bob said. "And he's solved why it screams."

"Not why," Jupiter corrected him. "Not when. The clock screams when the alarm is set. Why it does is a much better mystery. I have a feeling it will be an interesting one to investigate."

"What do you mean, investigate?" Pete asked. "How can you investigate a clock? Ask it questions? Give it the third degree?"

"A clock that screams when it should ring an alarm is certainly mysterious," Jupiter answered. "And the motto of The Time Investigation is——"

"We investigate anything!" Bob and Pete answered together.

"All right," Pete went on. "So it's a mystery. I still want to know how you can investigate it."

"By finding out why it was made to scream. There must be a reason for it," Jupiter told him.

"We haven't any other mystery to find right now, so I propose we get some good practice by investigating this screaming clock."

"Oh no!" Pete groaned. "We have to find the line somewhere."

But Bob looked interested. "How would you start, Juve?" he asked.

Jupiter reached for his tool kit, which was in a drawer of a nearby workbench. The workbench was in Juve's workshop section of the Time Shop.

Yard, owned and run by his uncle and aunt Titus and Mathilda Jones. Here, hidden from the eyes of curious adults by piles of junk, the boys could work undisturbed.

To one side of them was the big pile of miscellaneous salvage material—steel beams, lumber crates, an old playground chute—which the boys had carefully arranged to hide the small mobile home trailer that was Headquarters for The Three Investigators. They could get into it only through certain secret entrances too small for an adult. At the moment, however, they had no need to go inside.

Jupiter took out a screwdriver and began to remove the back of the clock. He slipped it down along the electric wire so that he could peer inside. For the second time he said, "Ahl!" He pointed with the screwdriver to something that had apparently been added to the interior of the clock. It was a disc about as large as a silver dollar, but thicker.

"I believe this is the mechanism that produces the scream," he said. "Someone very clever at mechanics has installed it in place of the regular alarm bell."

"But why?" Bob asked.

"That's the mystery. To start investigating it first we have to learn who did the work."

"I don't see how we can do that," Pete protested.

"You're not thinking like an investigator," Jupiter said. "Now put your mind to it. Tell me how you would begin with this mystery."

"Well—first I suppose I'd try to find out where the clock came from."

"Correct. And how would you go about that?"

"Well, the clock came into the salvage yard as junk," Pete said. "So I guess your Uncle Titus bought it. Maybe he remembers where he got it."

"Mr. Jones buys an awful lot of things," Bob said doubtfully. "He doesn't always keep track of where he got them."

"True," agreed Jupiter. "But Pete is right. The first thing to do is ask Uncle Titus if he knows where the clock came from. He gave it to me just half an hour ago in a box of odds and ends. Now let's see what else is in the box."

A cardboard carton sat on his workbench. Jupiter reached in and pulled out a stuffed owl with most of the feathers falling out. Underneath it was a clothesbrush, badly worn. Then came a broken goose-neck lamp, a vase with a chip in it, a pair of book ends made to look like horses' heads, and several other knick-knacks, most of them broken and all equally valuable—or useless, whichever way you chose to look at it.

"It looks to me," Jupiter remarked, "as if

someone cleaned out a lot of old stuff, put it in a box and threw it away. Then some refuse collector rescued it and sold the box to Uncle Titus. Uncle Titus will buy almost anything if the price is right. He counts on our ability to fix things so they can be sold again."

"I wouldn't give you a dollar for the lot," Pete said. "Except the clock. It seems like a good clock. Except for that scream when the alarm is turned on. Imagine waking up with that scream ringing in your ears!"

"Hmm." Jupiter looked thoughtful. "Suppose you wanted to frighten someone badly. Perhaps even scare them to death. So you slipped this clock into their bedroom in place of their regular clock, and the next morning when the alarm went off a fatal heart attack followed. That would certainly be a clever murder plot."

"Gosh!" Bob said. "You think that's what happened?"

"I haven't any idea," Jupiter answered. "I just suggested it as a possibility. Now let's go ask Uncle Titus if he knows where the clock came from."

He led the way from the workshop area to the little cabin in the front of the salvage yard which served as an office. Hans and Konrad, the two husky Bavarian yard helpers, were busy stacking usable building material in neat piles. Titus was a small man with an enormous moustache

and bright, twinkling eyes, was inspecting some used furniture.

"Well, boys?" Mr. Jones said as they approached. "Any time you want to make some spending money I've got a batch of furniture here that can use fixing up and painting."

"We'll get to it soon, Uncle Titus," Jupiter promised. "Right now we're interested in this clock. It was in that box of odds and ends you gave me to look over. Can you tell us where the box came from?"

"Hmm." Titus Jones thought deeply. "Got it from somebody. Didn't pay for it. Fellow threw it in with this furniture I bought. He's a refuse collector, up Hollywood way. Goes around salvaging stuff people put out for collection. Sells whatever has any value. Lots of people throw away good used stuff, you know."

"Do you know his name, Uncle Titus?"

"Just his first name. Tom. That's all. Expect him to drop in this morning with another load. You could ask him then."

At that moment an old pickup truck pulled into the yard, and a whiskery man wearing overalls hopped out.

"By gravy, here he is now," said Mr. Jones. "Good morning, Tom."

"Morning, Titus," he said. "Got some furniture for you. Real good stuff. Almost new."

"You mean it isn't old enough to be antique

yet." Titus Jones chuckled. "Give you ten dollars for the lot without looking at it."

"Taken," Tom said promptly. "Want me to unload it here?"

"Over behind the office. First, Jupiter here wants to ask you something."

"Sure thing. Shoot, boy."

"We're trying to trace a boxful of things you gave Uncle Titus," Jupiter said. "It had this clock in it, for one thing. We thought you might remember."

"Clock?" Tom chuckled. "I pick up a dozen clocks a week. Throw most of them away. Can't remember a clock."

"The box also had a stuffed owl in it," Bob spoke up. "Maybe you remember the owl."

"Owl? Owl? That rings a bell. Remember picking up a box with a stuffed owl in it. Don't pick up many stuffed owls. I remember that one, all right. It was in back of some house in—now just give me a minute, it'll come to me. It was in . . ."

Tom shook his head.

"Sorry, boy. It was at least two weeks ago. Had it in my garage ever since. I plain can't remember where I picked up that box of stuff."

Jupiter Finds a Clue

"WELL, that was one investigation that stopped even before it got started," Pete remarked. "Since we can't trace the clock, we can't possibly find out— What are you doing, Jupe?"

They were back in the workshop and Jupiter was turning over in his hands the empty cardboard box which held the screaming clock.

"Sometimes a box will have an address on it," he said. "The address it was delivered to."

"It looks like just a grocery carton to me," Bob said.

"You're right. There's no address on the box."

"Then as I said," Pete continued, "this is one investigation—What are you doing, Bob?"

Bob was picking up a rectangular piece of paper that had fluttered beneath the printing press.

"This fell out of the box," he told Jupiter. "It has some writing on it."

"Probably just a grocery list," Pete said. But he crowded closer to Bob. There were only a few words, written in ink, and Jupe read them aloud.

Dear Rex:

Ask Imogene.

Ask Gerald.

Ask Martha.

Then act! The result will surprise even you.

"Good grief!" Bob exclaimed. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Ask Gerald!" Pete groaned. "Ask Imogene! Ask Martha! Who are these characters and what are we supposed to ask them? And why?"

"I would guess this is all part of the mystery of the clock," Jupiter said.

"Why do you say that?" Bob asked. "It's just a slip of paper that was in the box. How do we know it has any connection with the clock?"

"I think it has," Jupiter told them. "Observe the paper. It has been trimmed with scissors to a certain size—about two inches wide by four inches long. Now look at the back. What do you see?"

"Looks like some dried glue," Bob said.

"Exactly. This slip of paper has been glued to something. Now let's look at the clock. On the bottom there's a space just large enough for the paper. When I put the two together the paper fits perfectly. I run my finger over the bottom of the clock, and I feel something rough. I deduce that it is also dried glue. So the answer is simple. This piece of paper was originally glued to the bot-

tom of the screaming clock, and it fell off ~~the~~
the clock was rattling around in the box."

"But why would anybody glue a crazy message like that to the bottom of a clock?" Pete wanted to know. "It doesn't make sense."

"A mystery wouldn't be a mystery if it wasn't mysterious," Jupiter told him.

"I'll buy that," Pete remarked. "Well, now we've doubled the mystery, and we're back where we started from. We still can't trace the clock and—What are you doing now, Jupe?"

"I'm scratching the dried glue off the bottom of the clock. There seems to be something under it. It's engraving, but it's too small to read and there is glue in the letters. Let's move into Headquarters and get a magnifying glass."

He stepped behind the printing press, moved aside a metal grating that just seemed to be leaning there, and uncovered the entrance to a large corrugated pipe. One after another they crawled through the pipe, which was about thirty feet long and padded with old rags so they wouldn't bang their knees. This was Tunnel Two. It ran partly underground and brought them directly beneath the mobile home ~~where~~ which was Headquarters.

Jupiter pushed up a trapdoor. They all scrambled into the tiny office of Headquarters, which had been fitted up some time ago with a desk, a small filing cabinet, a typewriter, and

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recorder and a telephone. Jupe flipped on the overhead light and took a large magnifying glass from the desk drawer. He studied the base of the electric alarm clock, nodded, and held it out to Bob.

Bob peered through the glass and saw, engraved into the metal base of the clock, a name in very tiny letters—*A. Felix*.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"I'll tell you in a minute, I think," Jupiter said. "Pete, hand me the telephone book. The classified section."

He took the phone book containing the classified advertising and began to turn the pages. Then he gave an exclamation of triumph.

"Look!" he said.

Under the heading **CLOCKMAKERS** there was an advertisement. It said: *A. Felix—Clockmaker unusual Jobs Our Specialty*. This was followed by a Hollywood address and a telephone number.

"Clockmakers," Jupiter informed them, "can engrave a code number on a watch or clock they fix. That helps them identify it if it comes in again. Or they sometimes engrave their name on a job they're very proud of. I think we've found out who fixed the clock so it would alarm. That's the first step in our investigation. The next step is to go ask Mr. Felix who hired him to do the job."

On the Trail

THE SHOP OF *A. Felix—Clockmaker* turned out to be a narrow store on a side-street off Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood's famous main thoroughfare.

"You may park here, Worthington," said Jupiter to the English chauffeur who had just driven them from Rocky Beach. Jupiter had won the use of Worthington and a superb antique Rolls-Royce some time before, as a result of winning a contest conducted by the Rent-'n-Ride Agency. The time during which he could use the car had recently expired, however, and the boys had been afraid they could not continue as investigators without this means of covering the vast distances of southern California. But because of the generosity of August August, a boy for whom they had located a valuable inheritance, they again had use of the fabulous car and chauffeur.

"Very good, Master Jupiter," replied the dignified Englishman. He parked the car, and the three boys got out.

They peered into a dusty, narrow shop win-

dow with the name *A. Felix—Clockmaker* lettered on it in peeling gold paint. The window was full of clocks, large and small, new and antique, plain ones and clocks ornately decorated with birds and flowers. As they watched, a door in a tall wooden clock opened and a toy bugler marched out, lifted his bugle, and blew several times to indicate the hour.

"That's pretty neat," Pete observed. "I'd rather be bugled at than screamed at."

"Let's go in and see if Mr. Felix can tell us anything," Jupiter said.

As they entered the shop they were confused by a loud buzz, as of millions of bees. Then they realized it was the sound of many clocks, maybe a hundred or more, all ticking away together.

A tiny man in a leather apron came towards them down an aisle crowded with clocks. He had bushy white eyebrows and sparkling black eyes.

"Are you looking for something special in a clock?" Mr. Felix asked cheerfully. "Or perhaps it's just a broken watch you wish me to fix?"

"No, sir," Jupiter replied. "We wanted to consult you about this clock."

He opened the zipper bag he carried and took out the screaming clock.

Mr. Felix studied it for a moment.

"A rather old electric alarm clock," he said. "Of little value. I do not believe it is worth fixing."

"It doesn't need fixing, sir," Jupiter said. "Plug it in, if you don't mind."

The tiny man shrugged. He plugged in the clock.

"Now turn on the alarm, sir," Jupiter requested.

Mr. Felix did. Instantly the terrifying scream filled the little shop. Mr. Felix hurriedly moved the small knob on the back of the clock. The scream died away to a mere whisper. Mr. Felix picked up the clock and studied the back. He smiled.

"I remember this clock now," he said. "That was a tricky job, though no more tricky than others I have done."

"Then you made the clock scream?" Pete asked.

"Yes, I did. An ingenious mechanism, wouldn't you say? But I am afraid I cannot tell you for whom I did it. All work that I do is confidential."

"Yes, sir," Jupiter said. "But you see, this clock was found thrown out in some trash. It must have been an accident. The owner obviously paid you a lot of money to make it scream for him, and he can't have meant to throw it away. We'd like to return it."

"I see," said Mr. Felix thoughtfully.

"We were hoping there might be a reward," Bob put in.



Mr. Felix shrugged and plugg

Mr. Felix nodded. "Well, that's perfectly proper. Yes, it must have been discarded by accident. The clock works perfectly well. Under the circumstances I believe that I can tell you as much as I am able. The name of the customer for whom I did the work was Clock."

"Clock?" Bob and Pete repeated the word in surprise.

"He called himself A. Clock. Of course I always thought he was making a joke because he brought me a number of clocks to work on from time to time."

"It doesn't sound like a real name," Jupiter mused. "But if he gave you his address, it wouldn't matter. We could go there anyway."

"Unfortunately, he just gave me a telephone number. Still, you could call him."

He popped behind a counter and brought out a big record book. He turned a few pages, and stopped.

"A. Clock," he read, "Telephone number——" And he gave a number which Bob, as record keeper, jotted down in a notebook.

"Can you tell us anything else, sir?" Jupiter asked. Mr. Felix shook his head.

"That's all," he said. "Perhaps I have said too much. Now excuse me, I have work to do. Time is precious, young gentlemen, and must be used well. Good-bye."

He scurried off. Jupiter squared his shoulders.

"Well, we've made some progress," he said. "Now we'll go out and telephone that number. I saw a telephone booth at the corner."

"What are you going to say?" Pete asked as Jupiter was entering the booth.

"I'm going to use strategy to get the address," Juve replied.

Bob and Pete squeezed in with him so they could listen to the conversation. The First Investigator dropped in a coin and dialled the number. After a moment a woman's voice answered.

"Good afternoon," Jupiter said, making his voice deep enough to sound like an adult. Juve had a lot of acting ability, which he occasionally used to good use. "This is the telephone company. We are having trouble with crossed cir-

cuits? I don't understand," the woman answered.

"We have had complaints of parties in your section getting wrong numbers," Jupiter said. "Could you tell me the address from which you are answering? It will help us check the circuits."

"The address? Why, this is 309 Franklin Street. But I don't see how——"

She was interrupted by a scream. It was a deep-voiced scream, as if she were frightened. All three boys

at the sound if they hadn't been wedged into the phone booth so tightly.

Then the phone went dead.

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The Screaming Grandfather

"THIS MUST BE the block, Worthington," Jupiter said. "Drive slowly and we'll look for the right number."

"Very good, Master Jones," Worthington agreed. He drove slowly down Franklin Street. It was in the older part of town, once fashionable, and the houses that lined it were large though somewhat run-down.

"There it is!" Pete cried.

Worthington stopped at the kerb. The boy climbed out and started up the walk, eyeing the house with interest. The shades were pulled down and the house almost seemed abandoned. There were two steps to the front door. The boy climbed them and Jupiter rang the bell.

For a long time nothing happened. Then the

"They've killed somebody and now they have to bury him!"

"Hadn't we better call the police?" Bob asked.

"Not yet," Jupiter said. "We need more facts. We have to try to get into this house."

"You mean break in?" Bob asked

"No." Jupe shook his head. "We have to get these people to let us in. I see Harry peeking through the window beside the door. I'm going to ring again."

He rang, hard. The door flew open.

"I said to go away!" Harry shouted. "We don't want anybody bothering us."

"We don't want to bother you," Jupiter said quickly. "We're investigating a mystery and we'd like your help. Look, here's our business card."

He whipped out one of the cards all three carried. Harry took it and looked at it. It said:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

"We Investigate Anything"

? ? ?

First Investigator - JUPITER JONES

Second Investigator - PETER CRENSHAW

Records and Research - BOB ANDREWS

"What are the question marks for?" Harry

sneered. "Do they mean you don't know what you're doing?"

"They stand for mysteries unsolved, riddles unanswered, puzzles of any kind," Jupiter said. "Our motto is right there, 'We Investigate Anything.' Right now we're investigating a very strange clock. See, here it is."

He brought out the clock and handed it to Harry. Curiosity made the boy look it over.

"What's so mysterious about it?" Harry demanded.

"We'll demonstrate if you'll let us use an electric socket," Jupiter said.

He stepped forward as if certain that Harry would let him in. Harry stood aside and they entered a dark, narrow hallway, with stairs on one side going up to the second floor. On the other side was a big grandfather clock, going tick tock, tick-tock. Beside the clock was a table with a telephone.

Bob and Pete peered around for the body of the mysterious Mr. Hadley, but they saw nothing. Jupiter spotted an electricity point beside the grandfather clock.

"I'll just plug the clock in here," he said, "and now I'll switch on the alarm lever and—listen!"

The clock screamed again. Its eerie wail in the dark hall brought out goose-pimples on Pete and Bob.

"There" Jupiter said, unplugging the clock.

"Wouldn't you say that's a mysterious clock worth investigating?"

"Nope!" Harry answered rudely. "Anyone can make a clock scream. Listen and I'll show you."

He reached behind the grandfather clock and pulled out an electric cord. He plugged it in and their hair stood on end as a man's deep voice rose in a scream, then faded away, as if he were falling over a high cliff.

The grandfather clock had screamed! This must be what they had heard over the telephone earlier.

The woman came hurrying out of a back room.

"Harry, for goodness sake, what——" she began. Then she saw The Three Investigators. "Oh," she said in confusion, "you let them in. What are you doing, Harry? What do they want here?"

"They have a screaming clock," Harry said as he pulled out the electric cord. "A little one. I never saw it before but it must have been Mr. Hadley's."

He took the clock from the table and handed it to his mother. She shook her head.

"No, I never saw it before," she said. "You're sure it was Mr. Hadley's?"

"Positive, Mom," Harry said. "Nobody else

would have a clock fixed so it would scream, would they?"

"No," his mother shook her head. "I guess not. But where did these boys get it?"

"I don't know yet," Harry said, still sounding almost angry but more friendly than he had been. "They're some kind of investigators and since they have one of Mr. Hadley's clocks I figured I might as well see what they want."

He opened a door and gestured for the three to go through it. They found themselves in a spacious library with panelled walls. On the walls were several framed oil paintings and at the other end of the room was a large mirror which reflected them and made the room seem bigger. There were shelves from floor to ceiling containing hundreds of books.

But what they noticed most were the clocks. There were a dozen or more of them in the room, some standing on the floor like the grandfather clock, others on tables and shelves. They all seemed old and valuable. Apparently they had all been electrified, as they didn't tick, but merely hummed.

"You see those clocks?" Harry demanded. "Well, I'll tell you something. Every one of them screams."

The Room of Clocks

THE ROOM WAS SCREAMING.

First it gave a high-pitched wail, like a frightened baby. Then it bellowed like a furiously angry man. Next it changed to a wild, animal-like cry which was the scream of a panther. Then from all sides came wails, screams, shrieks, bellows and animal snarls that blended into the most frightening sound any of the boys had ever heard. They sat side by side on a couch, cold chills running down their backs, and listened.

Harry sat at a desk, manipulating a set of switches to make the room scream. It was now apparent to The Three Investigators that all of the clocks in the room were equipped with screaming devices, probably similar to that in their alarm clock, and Harry was making them scream one by one and all together, with the ease of much practice.

He grinned at them, enjoying their amazement, and finally turned all the switches off, letting the room become silent.

"Bet you never heard anything like that be-

fore," he said. "You can see why your clock didn't mean anything to me. I'm used to clocks screaming."

"Is this room soundproofed?" Jupiter asked. "If it isn't, the neighbours will certainly be calling the police by now."

"Of course it's soundproofed," Harry said loftily. "This is Mr. Hadley's screaming room. He used to sit here at night and make all the clocks scream. He taught me how to do it before he—anyway, he taught me."

"Did something happen to Mr. Hadley?" Jupiter asked.

"No, of course not. Why should it?" Harry flared up.

"You started to say, 'before he——,' then you stopped. I thought you might have been going to say something happened to him."

"He went away, that's all. What's it to you, anyway?"

"We started out to investigate a screaming clock," Jupiter said. "Now we've run into a whole roomful of screaming clocks. It seems to me we have a much bigger mystery. Why should anyone have so many clocks fixed so they could scream like people and animals? It just doesn't make sense."

"I'll buy a double helping of that," Pete agreed. "It's about as wacky as anything I ever heard of."

"It was Mr. Hadley's hobby." Harry was defensive now. "A hobby doesn't have to make sense. He wanted a hobby nobody else had and he collected screaming clocks. What's your hobby?" He shot the final question at Jupiter.

"Solving mysteries," Jupe said. "Like this one."

"I tell you there isn't any mystery here!"

"Well, maybe there isn't a mystery but something's bothering you. You act as if you hate everybody. Why not tell us about it? Maybe we could help somehow."

"How could you help?" Harry flared up. "I mean, there's nothing bothering me. Except you guys. You're bothering me. Now why don't you get out and leave me alone."

He ran to the door and opened it.

"This way out!" he said. "And don't come back because—oh!" He broke off suddenly. The front door of the house had opened and a large man was coming in. He was not too tall, but he was very broad across the shoulders. He looked at Harry, then stared at the three boys. He scowled.

"What's this, Harry?" he demanded. "You've brought friends in the house to play, to make a lot of noise, to upset me? You know I must have absolute quiet."

"We aren't making any noise, Mr. Jeeters,"

Harry said, his tone sullen. "Anyway, this room is soundproof."

The big man gave Bob, Pete and Jupiter a long look, as if memorizing their appearance.

"I'll have to have a little talk with your mother," he said.

He went on up the stairs.

"What's he got against you bringing anybody in the house?" Bob asked, puzzled. "It's your house, isn't it?"

"No, it's Mr. Hadley's house," Harry said. "My mom is the housekeeper. We've been living here since Mr. Hadley went away, and we rent the upstairs floor to Mr. Jeeters because we have to have money to keep the house running. Now you'd better get going. You've caused enough trouble as it is."

"All right," Jupiter said. "Come on, Bob, Pete. Thanks for showing us the other screaming clocks, Harry."

He led the way out into the hall, where he picked up their own screaming alarm clock from the telephone table. He stowed it in the zipper bag and they all went out to where Worthington had the car parked.

"Well, we didn't get very far with this investigation," Pete grumbled as they climbed into the car. "I guess a man can collect screaming clocks if he wants to. That's the end of your mystery, Jupe."

"I suppose so," Jupiter agreed. He spoke to the chauffeur. "We're in Hollywood, Worthington, so let's stop at World Studios and ask if Mr. Hitchcock can see us. He might be interested in our clock."

"Very good, Master Jupiter," replied Worthington. He started the car.

"Wait a minute, Worthington," said Bob suddenly.

Harry Smith was running down the walk from the house. Pete rolled down the rear window and Harry leaned in, breathing hard.

"I'm glad I caught you," he said "I've made up my mind. You're investigators and maybe you can help after all. My dad's in jail for something he didn't do and I want you to help me prove he's innocent."

6

More Mystery

"GET IN THE CAR, Harry, and tell us about it," Jupiter said. "Then we'll have an idea whether we can help you or not."

Harry squeezed in with them. His story didn't take long to tell. About three years before, he

and his father and mother had come to live at Mr. Hadley's home. In return for an apartment at the back of the house and a small salary, Harry's mother acted as housekeeper for Mr. Hadley, who wasn't married. Harry's father was a life insurance salesman who was struggling to build up a business.

He had been starting to do fairly well. Then, six months ago, there had been a robbery in the home of a businessman in nearby Beverly Hills. Three very valuable modern paintings had been cut from their frames by a thief who had either squeezed in through a very small window, or else had had a duplicate key to the front door.

The police had learned that Ralph Smith, Harry's father, had visited the house from which the pictures were stolen just a couple of weeks before. He had been trying to sell the owner a life insurance policy. Of course he had seen the pictures, but he claimed he knew nothing about art and hadn't known they were valuable.

Just because he had been in the house, the police searched the Smiths' apartment. And spread out underneath the linoleum in the kitchen they had found the stolen pictures. They had arrested Harry's father, and at his trial he was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison. That had been three months ago. Harry's father had protested his innocence to the very end, saying he had no idea where the

stolen pictures had come from. However, the jury had found him guilty.

"And he didn't do it!" Harry finished. "My dad isn't a criminal. Mom and I'd know it if he was. Now the police think he's the one who's been stealing art treasures all over the city for the last ten years—just because he's an insurance salesman who is out a lot at night calling on people.

"So I want to hire you to help me. I can't pay you much because I've only got fifteen dollars in my savings bank, but it's all yours if you can do anything for my father."

Jupiter blinked, thinking about it. Bob and Pete looked blank. The way they figured it, the police had to be pretty positive to send anyone to jail.

"It's a very difficult case, Harry," Jupiter said at last. "There doesn't seem to be much to work on."

"If it was easy I wouldn't need investigators to help me!" Harry flared up. "You carry cards saying you're investigators! Well, let's see you prove it. Do some investigating!"

Jupiter pinched his lower lip, which always helped put his mental machinery in high gear.

"We'll do some thinking about it, anyway," he agreed. "But if your father didn't steal the paintings, how did they get underneath the linoleum in your kitchen?"

"I don't know." There was misery in Harry's voice as he spoke. "Mr. Hadley had a lot of visitors who came and went. Maybe one of them hid them there. Or someone who wanted to get even with my dad for something could have broken into the house late at night and hidden the paintings where they would be found."

"Didn't you keep the back door locked?" Bob asked.

"Sure, but it's an old house and an old lock. Easy to open. We never worried because there wasn't anything worth stealing in our apartment."

"Hmmm." Jupiter was still pinching his lip. "Notice that the paintings were slipped under the kitchen linoleum, the first handy place anyone would come to if they got in through the back door. They could hide them there and get away without coming any farther into the house."

"That's good thinking, Jupe," Pete declared. "I'll bet that's what happened."

"What if Mr. Hadley stole them and hid them there?" Bob put in.

"Did the police have any suspicion of Mr. Hadley?" Jupiter asked.

Harry shook his head. "Mr. Hadley wouldn't do a thing like that. He liked us. And another thing, he was home the night the pictures were stolen."

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"And he didn't do it!" Harry finished. "My dad isn't a criminal. Mom and I'd know it if he was. Now the police think he's the one who's been stealing art treasures all over the city for the last ten years—just because he's an insurance salesman who is out a lot at night calling on people.

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victed. Then, just after Harry's father had been sentenced to jail, Mr. Hadley had announced he was going abroad for his health. He asked Mrs. Smith to take care of the house while he was gone.

Mr. Hadley had left, taking two suitcases with him, and they hadn't heard a word from him since. Several friends had dropped by to see him, but eventually they all had stopped coming. After a time the money Mr. Hadley had left ran out, and just about then Mr. Jeeters had come by looking for a place to rent rooms. Mrs. Smith had rented the top floor to him. He had made it clear that he wanted complete quiet and privacy, and he was very fussy about it.

"So that's it," Harry said. "That's all I know. It isn't much, you can see that. I suppose," he finished gloomily, "you can't really help my dad any. Nobody can. I apologize for acting nasty earlier. When you telephoned I made the hall clock scream to stop my mother from talking to you. I thought you were reporters or something. It's just—well, I feel so bad about everything."

"We understand," Jupiter said. "And we'll think about the problem. We'll let you know if we get any ideas."

They said good-bye to Harry, who climbed out of the car. Worthington started it up again.

"Where to, Master Jupiter?" he asked. "Home now?"

Jupiter deep in thought, shook his head.

"We started to drop in to see Alfred Hitchcock," he said. "If Mr. Hadley was an actor once, maybe Mr. Hitchcock knew him—he's worked with hundreds of actors. Take us to World Studios, Worthington."

"Very good, sir." The English chauffeur turned the car round and in a few minutes they were outside the front gate of World Studios, which occupied a whole block behind high walls. The gateman spoke on the phone, found that Mr. Hitchcock was in his office and would see them, and a few minutes later all three boys were seated opposite the famous director's big desk.

"Well, lads," Alfred Hitchcock rumbled, what brings you this way? Working on another investigation?"

"Yes, sir," Jupiter said. "Though it seems pretty mixed up right now and I'm not sure it means anything. You see, we started out to investigate a screaming clock and——"

"Screaming Clock!" Alfred Hitchcock interrupted in surprise. "What's happened to him, anyway? I haven't heard that name in years!"

The Clock is Stolen

"*Him?*" Jupiter exclaimed in amazement. "You mean there's a real person named Screaming Clock?"

"That was his nickname," Mr. Hitchcock explained. "His real name was Albert Clock, and for fun people called him Screaming Clock. You see, he was a screamer."

The more Mr. Hitchcock told them, the more puzzled the three became.

"A screamer?" Jupiter asked. "I'm not sure I know what that means."

"He screamed for a living," Mr. Hitchcock chuckled. "You see, back in the days before television, radio programmes featuring mystery stories were very popular. Why, at one time there were thirty-five mystery programmes a week on the radio. I don't believe there's even one on now. You lads are too young to remember, but those programmes were quite exciting."

"On a great many shows, someone screamed. A scream makes an exciting sound effect. You



Hadley, and Harry's father's arrest. Mr. Hitchcock looked thoughtful.

"Rather odd," he said. "This Hadley sounds like Bert Clock, all right. Clock was a small man, and you say Hadley was small and plump. He could easily have put on weight since I last saw him. Now that I think about it, I did hear he had come into money just about the time his radio work was becoming scarce.

"I can easily imagine him having a lot of different clocks made to scream the different screams he was an expert at. It would remind him of his past work and give his friends a chuckle. I can't imagine why he changed his name, though."

"Was he interested in art at all, Mr. Hitchcock?" Bob asked.

"Not that I know of. Some actors are collectors. In fact, here in Hollywood there is a surprising amount of valuable art owned by various actors, producers and directors. But I never heard of Bert Clock being interested in art."

"Thank you, sir." Jupiter stood up, and so did the others. "You've told us some things we'll have to think about. Mr. Clock also being Mr. Hadley is rather puzzling. And how the arrest of Harry's father fits in the picture I don't know yet. If we make any progress we'll let you know."

With that they said good-bye, and Worthington drove them back to Rocky Beach and The

Jones Salvage Yard. The chauffeur dropped them off, and the boys walked thoughtfully through the tall, iron gates into the crowded salvage yard. They were hardly inside when a man stepped out from behind a pile of lumber.

"You boys!" he said. "Remember me, do you?"

It was Mr. Jeeters, whom they had last seen an hour or so before at the home of Harry Smith.

"You have a clock," Mr. Jeeters growled. "In that bag. It belongs to me."

Unexpectedly he lunged at them, and snatched the zipper bag from Jupiter's hand.

"Now," he said, "it's my clock. I have it, and possession is nine-tenths of the law"

"You can't do that!" Pete shouted. He flung himself at Mr. Jeeters's legs in a flying tackle. Bob and Jupiter wouldn't let Pete attack unaided, and Jupe grabbed at the man's arm while Bob tried to pull the zipper bag from his hands.

Mr. Jeeters, however, was amazingly strong. He brushed Bob and Jupiter aside as if they were sparrows, then clamped powerful fingers on the back of Pete's shirt. He tossed him to one side in the dirt.

"Just try that again if you want to get hurt!" he sneered.

At that moment, Hans, one of the tall Bavarian yard helpers, put a large hand on the man's shoulder.



Pete flung himself at Mr. Jeeters's legs.

"I think better you give Jupe back his bag, Mister," Hans said.

"You big lug!" Mr. Jeeters snarled. "Let go of me!"

He aimed a fist at Hans's jaw. Hans ducked, and as the two men struggled wildly, Mr. Jeeters dropped the bag. Pete scooted in and recaptured it, then retreated to a safe distance as the two men, grunting and puffing, tried to throw each other down.

It was Hans who finally got the better of the struggle. Getting a grip around the other man's body, he lifted him high in the air like an angry child.

"What you want I do, Jupe?" Hans asked calmly. "Hold this fellow while you call police?"

"No, I don't believe so," Jupe answered, thinking swiftly. The police might not take the theft of an almost worthless alarm clock seriously. If they did, they'd probably want to hold on to the clock as evidence and now, more than ever, Jupiter wanted to investigate the mystery behind it.

"Just put Mr. Jeeters down and let him go," Jupiter suggested. "We have the clock back."

"Okay," said Hans reluctantly, and he let the other man fall in a heap on the ground.

Mr. Jeeters picked himself up and brushed gravel from his clothes. "All right, you kids!" he growled. "You'll be sorry for this. You'll live

to regret the minute you ever saw that clock!"
And with those words, he stalked out.

8

Who is Rex?

"THE MEETING will come to order," Jupiter Jones said, rapping on the desk. The other three boys in the tiny office of Headquarters quieted. It was the afternoon following their discovery of the screaming clock and Mr. Jeeters's attempt to get it away from them. They had been busy, and now they were conferring to see what progress they had made, if any.

Jupiter had phoned Harry Smith at his home that morning. As Harry had recently got his driver's licence and could drive the old car that had belonged to his father, he had driven down to The Jones Salvage Yard at Rocky Beach to join them.

"Bob, give us your report," Jupiter said. Bob had been the busiest of them all. That morning he had driven into Los Angeles with his father, who was a feature writer for a big Los Angeles newspaper. His father had introduced him to the man in charge of the records room, called "the

morgue" in newspaper slang. Here were hundreds of filing cabinets containing clippings of all the stories that had been in the newspaper, arranged both by subject matter and by name of the person involved.

Bob's job had been to look up first anything he could learn about Harry's father, Ralph Smith, and his trial, then about A. Clock or Mr. Hadley, then about thefts of valuable paintings in general.

Bob was armed with a sheaf of notes. He had a lot of information to pass on to the others, but he made it as brief as possible.

There wasn't much to tell about Ralph Smith's trial that they didn't know already. The evidence was circumstantial, but strong enough to convince the police that they had their man. They had tried to get Mr. Smith to admit he had been the art thief who had been operating around Hollywood and Los Angeles for some ten years, but Harry's father had stoutly maintained his innocence.

"Some of the thefts happened while you were still living in San Francisco, didn't they, Harry?" Bob asked.

"Yes, that's right. We only moved down to Hollywood about six years ago," Harry answered. "So you see, my dad has to be innocent. He couldn't have been involved in any of those first thefts."

"If the same ring was guilty all along, he couldn't," Jupiter put in. "Tell us about the series of art thefts in this city, Bob."

Bob obliged. There had been at least a dozen major robberies of valuable paintings in the last ten years, approximately at the rate of one a year. As Mr. Hitchcock had said, many wealthy film actors and directors collected art, and they had some immensely valuable paintings in their homes. Naturally, these weren't guarded as well as pictures in a museum would be. In every case the thieves had got in through a window or by picking the lock of a door, had cut the paintings out of their frames, and had vanished without leaving a trace.

"The police theory has been that these paintings were sold to wealthy South American collectors who would keep them hidden in their own private collections for their own enjoyment," Bob said. "Valuable paintings are known just about everybody in the art world, so they wouldn't have been sold legitimately. They must have been sold to people who wouldn't ever show them."

"And none of them were ever recovered?" Jupiter asked.

"None of them. Not until the three were found at Harry's house," Bob answered. He went on to tell them about the biggest theft, some two years before. Many rare paintings had been loaned to

a gallery for a special exhibit. Before the exhibit even opened, the thieves had broken in and stolen five paintings, with a total value of half a million dollars.

"This wasn't a record, though," Bob added. "Not long ago someone cut out a door panel in an English museum and stole eight pictures valued at between four and eight million dollars. They were later recovered, but that's the record for an art theft so far."

"Wow!" exclaimed Pete. "That's a lot of money for paintings."

"Right," Bob agreed. "Anyway a lot of very valuable art has been stolen in this city, so smoothly that the police have been baffled every time. Apparently they now believe that Harry's father had a hand in most of the thefts, but they wouldn't even have suspected him if he hadn't been in the house trying to sell life insurance a few days before. So——"

"Now wait a minute!" Harry burst out angrily. "I tell you my father didn't do it. If you're trying to say that just because he sold insurance and got around to a lot of big houses——"

"Take it easy, Harry," Jupiter said quietly. "We don't believe your father did it. The question of how those pictures got under the linoleum in your kitchen is another mystery. We seem to have a lot of them. One: who stole the

pictures? Two: how did they get where they were found? Three: why did Mr. Hadley, or Mr. Clock, which seems to be his real name, go on a trip and disappear? Four: where did the clock actually come from, and what does it mean?"

He touched the clock, which stood on the desk in front of him.

"This clock certainly means something," he said. "Mr. Jeeters was mighty anxious to get it away from us yesterday. That means it has to be important somehow."

"I'm sorry I told Mr. Jeeters about you and the clock," Harry apologized. "But after you left he started asking me questions about you, and—well, he frightened my mother. So I told him you'd been there to ask about one of Mr. Hadley's screaming clocks you had found, and that seemed to set him off. He grabbed your card away from me and left in a hurry."

"Fortunately, Hans was here to render us assistance," Jupiter said. "Tell me, Harry, has Mr. Jeeters acted suspiciously in any way while he's been living in the house?"

"He wanders round the house a lot at night!" Harry blurted out. "He claims he's a writer and can't sleep. One night I heard him tapping on walls like he was hunting for something."

"Mmmm." Jupiter pinched his lip and looked thoughtful. "I have an idea, but it may be all

wrong. Let's get back to business. I don't see how we can solve the art thefts if the police can't. But we still have the mystery of the clock to investigate. We haven't puzzled out where it came from yet. Let's tackle that next."

"What good will that do my father?" Harry flared up. "He's in jail and you go around investigating an old clock!"

"We have to start someplace," Jupiter told him. "We have several mysteries here and I think the clock is a link between them somehow."

"Well, okay," Harry grumbled. "But how can you trace the clock if it was thrown out in someone's rubbish?"

"We have a message that was pasted on the bottom of it," Jupiter said. He opened a secret drawer in the desk, used for keeping small objects safe, and took out the paper they had found with the clock. He read the message out loud again:

Dear Rex:

Ask Imogene.

Ask Gerald.

Ask Martha.

Then act! The result will surprise even you.

"I still say, who are these characters?" Pete said. "How can we ever locate them and what do we ask them if we find them?"

"One thing at a time," Jupiter said. "It seems

the message is addressed to Rex. So I deduce that the clock containing the message must have been sent to this Rex. Let's locate Rex."

"As Pete says, how?" Bob put in.

"We must be logical," Jupiter said. "Rex must be a friend of Mr. Clock, or Mr. Hadley—let's all call him Mr. Clock from now on for the sake of clarity. Anyway, Rex must be a friend to be addressed by his first name. Harry, did you bring Mr. Clock's address book?"

"I couldn't find one," Harry said, beginning to get interested. "But I did find a list of people he used to send Christmas cards to, stuffed in the back of a drawer."

He brought out a folded sheet of paper. Jupiter smoothed it out.

"Good," he said. "Mr. Clock's friends should be on a Christmas card list. There are about a hundred names here, and addresses too, all typed out. Now first let's find Rex."

"I see an Imogene, and two Gerald's, and three Marthas," Bob said. "But no Rex."

"You're right, no Rex," Jupiter agreed.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" Bob burst out. "Look, there's a name, Walter King."

"What about it?" Pete asked.

"King in Latin is Rex," Bob said. "It might be a nickname for a man named King."

"It sounds more like a dog to me," Harry mumbled. But Jupiter was writing down the

name of Walter King, and the address, on a card.

"Very good deduction, Bob," he said. "It's our only lead, so we'll have to try it. Now let's see about Imogene, Gerald, and Martha. Here's Miss Imogene Taylor, out in North Hollywood. Here are two Gerald's, both over near Pasadena, and here are three Marthas, scattered around the city. There are four of us, so I propose we break up into two teams. Bob, you and Harry can be one team, as Harry has a car. Pete and I will be the other team and we'll call Mr. Gelbert at the Rent-'n-Ride Auto Agency for the car.

"We'll contact these people, see what we can learn, and get back here sometime this afternoon. Bob, you take Mr. King and Miss Imogene, since they both live in the same direction, and Pete and I will take the others."

"But what'll I ask them?" Bob inquired.

"Ask Mr. King if Mr. Clock sent him the clock, and whether he ever noticed the message on the bottom or did anything about it," Jupiter suggested. "Also why he threw it away. You'd better take the clock along with you, to show him in case he's forgotten."

"Right," Bob said. "What'll I say to Miss Imogene?"

"Well, you could ask her if Mr. Clock left any message with her," Jupe said. "Maybe you'll need to show her the clock to convince her the message is intended for you."

"All right, but suppose you need the clock to show to Gerald and Martha?"

"I'll take along a clock that looks like the original," Jupiter said. "Chances are we won't have to show it, just mention it. However, we have several old clocks around the salvage yard that look enough like Mr. Clock's.

"Well, is everything straight? If so, I suggest we get started. Bob and Harry, you two can go right away. Pete and I will have to wait for Worthington."

"Wait a minute!" Pete said suddenly. "Jupe, you're overlooking something very important. We can't start out now."

Jupiter blinked. "Why not?" he asked.

"Because," Pete told him with a straight face, "it's lunch-time."

9

Mystery Upon Mystery

"WE OUGHT TO BE NEARLY THERE," Bob said, scanning the street numbers as Harry drove his father's old sedan through an attractive section of North Hollywood. "Yes, there's Mr. King's number."

Harry parked the car and they both got out.

"Costs money to live out here," Harry remarked as they walked up the curving stone walk to the house.

Bob nodded. He carried in his hand the zipper bag containing the screaming clock. He wondered if they would find it had really come from this house whose bell he was now ringing.

The door opened and a woman looked out at them. She was not young, and she seemed to be under a strain.

"Yes, what is it?" she asked. "If you're collecting for the Boy Scouts, I already made a donation."

"No, ma'am" Bob said politely. "I wondered if I could speak to Mr. King, please."

"No you can't. He's ill. He's been in the hospital for several months."

"I'm very sorry to hear that," Bob said, thinking hard. If Mr. King was in the hospital, he couldn't very well have thrown away the clock. But he knew Jupe wouldn't give up without trying further, so he asked another question.

"Is Mr. King's nickname Rex, ma'am?"

The woman stared at him. Bob was perfectly polite and looked respectable; otherwise she looked as if she would have closed the door in his face.

"Yes, it is," she said. "Why in the world are you asking? If this is some kind of game——"

"Oh, it isn't a game," Bob said hurriedly. "We're investigating a clock, Mrs. King. I'll show it to you." He took the clock from the zipper bag and held it up. "I wonder if you have ever seen it before."

"That horrible clock!" she cried. "Imagine sending such a thing to my husband, and when he was ill, too. If he'd ever heard it, it would have made him much worse. That dreadful scream!"

Bob and Harry exchanged quick glances. They had come to the right place, after all.

"Then Mr. Clock did send it to Mr. King?" Bob persisted.

"That horrible Bert Clock!" Mrs. King said indignantly. "Sending my husband a thing like that. Just because they used to work together years ago when my husband was writing a radio mystery show. Why, I plugged it in and set the alarm, never dreaming what it was, and when it went off that awful scream nearly gave me heart failure. I put it right into the rubbish and set it out for the refuse collector. Where on earth did you get it?"

"The refuse collector sold it to a friend of mine," Bob said. "Did you notice the message on the bottom?"

"Message on the bottom?" The woman frowned. "I didn't see any message. Of course, I got rid of the nasty thing the very next day.

There was a short letter with it from Bert Clock, but I threw it away."

"Can you possibly remember what it said?" Bob asked. "It's really very important."

"What it said? Oh, something about if my husband would listen to the clock and heed it well it might help mend his broken fortunes. Some nonsense. I think it was unpleasant of Bert Clock to play such a joke on my husband when he was ill and not working and worrying so much about the bills. They were very good friends once, too. I don't know why Bert Clock would want to scare us out of our wits with one of his horrible screams."

She paused, and frowned again.

"Why on earth do you want to know all this?" she asked. "Why are you interested in the clock?"

"We're trying to learn all about it," Bob said. "Mr. Clock has—well, he's disappeared and we think the clock may be a clue or something. You didn't notice where the clock was mailed from, did you?"

"No, I didn't. That's queer. Bert Clock disappeared. I wonder why—Oh, excuse me, I hear the telephone ringing. I've told you all I can, boys. Good-bye."

The door closed. Bob turned to Harry.

"See how an investigation works, Harry?" he said. "We've already learned a lot. I don't know

what it all means, but even without Jupe I can tell that Mr. Clock sent this clock to Mr. King for a good reason. Only he never got it. He was sick in the hospital and his wife threw it away. Maybe Mr. King would have known what it meant, but we can't see him, so we'll have to figure it out for ourselves."

"Gosh!" Harry was getting into the spirit of the investigation. "Now let's try Miss Imogene Taylor. I wonder what she'll be able to tell us?"

As it turned out, Miss Taylor couldn't tell them much. She was a little, bird-like woman who lived in a tiny house out in Woodland Hills, a few miles beyond North Hollywood. It was a small cottage almost hidden behind bushes and banana trees, and Miss Taylor, with her grey hair and her chirping voice, and her old-fashioned gold spectacles, looked as if she had stepped out of a fairy tale.

She invited them into a living-room so full of papers and magazines and fancy cushions that it looked as if she could never find anything in it. But when she heard Bob's question about Mr. Clock and a message, she pushed her spectacles up on her forehead and started rummaging through her desk, talking all the time in little breathless chirps.

"My goodness!" she said. "Someone's really come. For the message. I thought it was just a joke. One of Bert Clock's jokes. He was a great

practical joker in the studio. The radio studio, that is. When we were all doing radio shows. I lost track of him after that. Until the letter came. With a piece of paper in it. The letter said to give the message to anyone who came asking for it, especially if they mentioned a clock. Now where on earth did I put my glasses? I can't see a thing without them."

Bob explained to her that she had pushed her glasses up on her forehead, and she quickly pulled them down. Her hand darted into a cubbyhole, and came out with a slip of paper.

"Here it is!" she said. "I knew I had it. Even if it's one of Bert's jokes, we were good friends, so I'll help it along. But surely you boys are too young to have heard Bert on the radio."

"Yes, ma'am," Bob said. "We never met him, but we're working on his joke, or whatever it is, to try to find out what he meant. Thank you very much for the message."

"Oh, you're welcome, you're welcome. Dear me, if you see Bert, give him my regards. Oh, what a wonderful screamer that man was. People used to stay up just to hear him on our radio show. It was called *A Scream at Midnight*, you know, and it was wonderfully scary. Rex King wrote it. He was wonderful at puzzles and clues and mysteries and things. My, yes. Can I give you boys a nice cup of tea? No? Well, if you have to go I understand. Bo

hurry. That's the way boys are made."

Once outside in the car, Bob and Harry drew deep breaths.

"Whew!" Harry said and grinned. "I didn't think she'd ever stop talking. But anyway, we got a message. Let's see what it says."

Bob held the sealed envelope.

"Maybe we should wait for Jupe," he answered. "But—well, I guess we can take a look now."

He opened the envelope and slid out a slip of paper while Harry watched eagerly. Then their faces became puzzled. The message inside the envelope said:

It's quiet there even in a hurricane.

Just a word of advice, politely given.

Old English bowmen loved it.

Bigger than a raindrop; smaller than an ocean.

I'm 26. How old are you?

It sits on a shelf like a well-fed elf.

Bob and Harry stared at it in dismay.

"Good gosh!" Harry groaned. "What in the world does all that mean?"



Mrs. Harris kept cats—lots of cats, all Siamese

sage from me, give him this envelope and my blessing. Let him have fun with it."

She dug into a drawer, chasing a cat out of the way, and handed Jupiter an envelope.

"What in the world is Bert Clock up to these days?" she asked. "Last I heard, years ago, he'd come into a little money and retired. Anyway, there wasn't much work for a screamer after radio died."

"We don't know much about him," Jupiter answered. "He disappeared a few months ago."

"How mysterious!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris. "But then, Bert Clock was always a strange little fellow. Never could tell what he was thinking. Knew all sorts of odd people—jockeys and gamblers and people like that."

"Thank you very much for the envelope," Jupiter said. "Come on, Pete, we have to be going now."

They left Mrs. Harris with all her cats and went out to the car where Worthington was waiting.

"Now let's see this message," Pete said eagerly.

"Let's get in the car first," Jupiter said. They climbed into the rear of the car and Jupiter tore the envelope open. In it he found a sheet of paper similar to the one Bob and Harry had found, and a message that was even stranger because it wasn't in words, just numbers.

There was a whole column of numbers on the paper, and they started off like this:

3-27 4-36 5-19 48-12 7-11 15-9 101-2 5-16 45-98-98 20-135 84-9

They continued for another ten or fifteen lines, just as mysterious and meaningless.

"Jumping grasshoppers!" Pete exclaimed. "That means something?"

"It's obviously a code of some sort," Jupiter answered. "We'll get a message that makes sense once we solve the code. We'll tackle it later." Jupiter folded the message and put it into his pocket. "Now we must try to locate Gerald. There are two Gerald's on the Christmas card list, and the closest one is Gerald Cramer. We'll try him first."

He gave Worthington the address and they started off. Jupe pinched his lip thoughtfully as they drove, but said nothing, and Pete thought that if they were making any progress, he certainly wasn't aware of it. Still, maybe the next message would tell them more.

They pulled to a stop before a house in a rather run-down section. He and Pete got out and started up the walk.

"Of course, as there are two Gerald's on the list," Jupiter remarked as they rang the bell, "our chance of getting the right one is only fifty-fifty. However——"

There was a whole column of numbers on the page, and they started off like this:

3-27 4-35 5-19 42-72 7-11 15-9 191-2 3-16 41-37
93-92 29-135 24-9

They continued for another ten or fifteen lines, just as mysterious and meaningless.

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"Of course, as there are two Gerald's on the list," Jupiter remarked as they rang the bell, "our chance of getting the right one is only fifty-fifty. However——"

"Yeah? Whadda you want?"

A small man, not as tall as Jupiter, thin and bowlegged, appeared at the door.

"Excuse me," Jupiter said, ignoring the suspicious stare the small man gave him. "I believe you know Mr. Bert Clock?"

"Know Bert Clock? Who says I know Bert Clock?" the man demanded. "It's a lie. I never heard of Bert Clock in my life. Now beat it."

"One moment, Gerald, my friend," said a cultured voice, and a tall, distinguished-looking man with glossy black hair appeared behind the small man. He spoke with a Spanish accent.

"Why are you inquiring about someone known as Bert Clock?" he asked Pete and Jupiter. "You are not, I suppose, detectives?" And he smiled.

"As a matter of fact——" Pete started to say, but stopped when Jupiter nudged him.

"We are tracing a message Mr. Clock left with some friends," Jupiter told the tall man. "He left it in different parts. One part he left with a friend named Gerald, and we thought that it might be Gerald Cramer, because his name is on Mr. Clock's Christmas card list."

"Very interesting," the man said. "Please come in. I believe I can help you. My friend here is Gerald Cramer and I apologize for his rudeness. He has had much trouble in his life."

Pete and Jupe followed the two men into a rather untidy living-room and sat down.

"I don't know what this is all about, Carlos," the small man grumbled. "But I don't like it."

"Please allow me to handle this matter," the man addressed as Carlos said sharply. To Jupiter he said, "You see, we are disturbed about Bert Clock's disappearance, and the curious message he sent to Gerald. We are anxious to know all you can tell us about him. Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir," Jupiter replied. "We're just tracing his message. You see, first we ran across a peculiar clock Mr. Clock sent someone, then——"

"A clock?" Carlos interrupted. "Do you have it there?" He looked fixedly at the small zipper bag Jupiter carried.

Jupiter took out the clock, which was an imitation of the real screaming one, and held it up.

"This is our credential, sir," he said.

The tall man took the clock and peered at it.

"A very ordinary looking clock," he said.

"Now about the message. What was it?"

"It wasn't very clear," Jupiter answered. "It said to ask Martha and ask Gerald. But it didn't say what to ask them. We found a lady named Martha, who had received a letter from Mr. Clock and a sealed envelope she was to give to anyone asking about him. We came here next because Gerald Cramer was the next name on

the Christmas card list. Does Mr. Cramer have a message for us?"

"He does indeed have a message," Carlos told him. "But it is a little different from the other. It says that before releasing it he must see the other message. May I see the message this lady named Martha gave you?"

"Well——" Jupiter hesitated. But Carlos was holding out his hand, and Jupiter reached in his pocket and brought out the paper with the long list of numbers on it. Carlos examined it, and his look was disappointed.

"Just numbers!" he said. "It seems to be a code. What does it mean?"

"I don't know," Jupiter said. "I hoped the next message would tell us. Gerald's message."

"Perhaps it will," Carlos agreed. "However, at this point I think I will take charge. This clock and these messages were never meant for you in the first place. Now just give me any other messages you may have and I will handle the matter henceforth."

"We haven't any other messages," Jupiter said, turning slightly pale, for Carlos suddenly looked menacing. "We'd like the clock back, please, and the message. It's our clock and our investigation——"

"Grab them, Jerry!" Carlos snapped. "We must search them and get any other messages they have."

"Gotcha, kid!" the little man grunted and wrapped strong, sinewy arms around Pete, pinning him tightly.

At the same moment, miles away, Bob and Harry also found themselves in trouble.

Leaving the home of Miss Taylor, Bob and Harry had started for Rocky Beach in Harry's car. They were only a mile or so from Rocky Beach, but still in the hills which form the Santa Monica Mountains, when Bob spotted a car behind them. It was dark blue with a white roof, and he had seen it earlier, when they first turned on to this little-used road. Now it was close, and coming up fast.

"Harry!" Bob said tensely. "I think we're being followed. That car's been behind us for miles. And now I think it's trying to catch up with us."

"We'll see about that!" Harry said and stepped hard on the gas.

The old car leaped forward, whipped around a curve, and started down a long hill.

Bob looked behind them. The blue car was closing the gap recklessly. It pulled up to within a hundred yards of them. Harry stepped harder on the gas. The old sedan was moving dangerously fast, but the blue and white car kept creeping closer.

Harry took a sharp turn so fast that the sedan

nearly went off the road at the edge of a cliff. When they straightened out, he turned a pale face to Bob.

"I'm not a good enough driver to go fast on these hills," Harry said to Bob. "He's going to catch us, whoever he is."

"Just a little farther," Bob said hopefully. "When we come to Rocky Beach, he'll be afraid to chase us."

"I'll try," Harry said. "I'll keep to the middle of the road—then he can't pass."

Doggedly he held the sedan in the middle of the road, and the car behind crept up almost to the rear bumper, looking back, Bob could see a figure hunched over the wheel. The man looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place him.

They roared along the lonely road, watching desperately for the descent from the hills to the city of Rocky Beach. Then, to avoid a hole in the road, Harry had to pull over close to the right shoulder. Immediately the pursuing car moved up beside them and began to edge them closer and closer to the side of the road.

"I've got to stop!" Harry yelled. "We'll be wrecked."

He stepped on the brake. As they slowed, the vehicle beside them slowed also. Bob peered across at it, trying to recognize the driver, who wore dark glasses. He couldn't place him, but still the sense of familiarity nagged at him.

Harry slowed the car to a stop. Their pursuer stopped beside them. Then, to their surprise, the blue car shot forward and disappeared around a curve.

"Now what do you make of that?" Harry asked in amazement. "First he chases us, then he beats it!"

An instant later they learned the reason. A siren wailed faintly in the distance, then it grew louder and louder, and a Rock Beach police car pulled up beside them. The siren died away as a grim-looking officer got out and walked towards them.

"All right, let's see your driver's licence!" he barked at Harry. "I've seen a lot of reckless driving, but none like you just did over these hills. Even if you have a licence, you're in for a lot of trouble!"

11

The Other Gerald

"I'VE GOT HIM!" the little man named Gerald yelled, his arms around Pete.

"Hold him!" ordered the bigger man, Carlos.

He snatched a letter-opener from the desk and pushed the point against Jupiter's chest.

"Now, young man, stand still and give me all the messages you have!"

Jupiter stood perfectly still. Pete, however, unable to see that Carlos had a weapon, was not giving up without a struggle. Being on the high school wrestling team, he knew something about breaking holds. He flung his arms outward while at the same time bending his body forwards with a whip-like motion.

Gerald went flying over his head. He crashed into Carlos, who went down with Gerald on top of him.

"Let's get out of here, Second!" Jupiter cried. Carlos, lying slightly stunned on the floor, still held the message they had obtained from Mrs. Harris. Jupiter reached down to pull it from his fingers, and turned towards the door. He and Pete bumped for a moment, sticking in the door, and then they were racing down the walk to the car.

"The clock!" Pete shouted. "You left the clock!"

"It wasn't the real clock anyway," Jupiter replied as they got in the car. "Worthington, get us away from here fast!"

"Very good, sir," the chauffeur said. He had the car moving so quickly that Jupe and Pete tumbled on to the floor in the rear. In a moment

they got untangled and sat up. Jupe held up the message.

"This is the important thing, the message from Mr. Clock," he said. "I got it back and we——"

He stopped. They both looked at the paper.

It was torn across the middle. Jupiter only had half of it. The other half was still back in Carlos's hand.

"Oh, oh!" Pete said. "That's bad. We've lost half the message."

"Maybe we ought to go back," Jupiter said thoughtfully.

"And tackle those guys again?" Pete protested.

"No," Jupiter agreed after another moment of thought. "By now Carlos would have the other half of the message hidden and would deny everything."

"Where to now, sirs?" Worthington asked from up front. "Or do you wish to return to Headquarters?"

"No," Jupiter answered. "We still have one more message to find. Gerald Cramer was the wrong Gerald, obviously. We'll try Gerald Watson next." He gave Worthington the address, and he and Pete settled back.

"Listen, First," Pete said, "I've been thinking. That little guy, Gerald Cramer, didn't have any message from Mr. Clock. Just the same he and

Carlos were awfully interested as soon as they learned about the messages. What do you make of that?"

"I'm not sure," Jupiter answered. "It suggests to me they know something about Mr. Clock that we don't, and consider the messages important. We'll just have to try to find out why. Maybe the messages themselves will tell us when we solve them."

"When we solve them!" Pete laughed hollowly. "By then we'll be old men with long white beards, if that message you've got is any sample. Besides, you only have half of it."

"I'm aware of that," Jupiter snapped. "We'll just have to do the best we can. Worthington, is this the address?"

"It appears to be, sir," the English chauffeur said as he brought the car to a stop. "Do you anticipate any danger this time?"

"I don't think so," Jupiter replied. "If we need you, we'll shout. Come on, Second."

Pete followed him up the walk to a nice little Spanish-style house surrounded by gardens. An elderly man was pottering with some roses in front, and he looked up.

"Mr. Gerald Watson?" Jupiter asked.

The man nodded. "That's me," he said, taking off his gardening gloves. "What can I do for you? I don't suppose you want my autograph?" He chuckled. "It's been years since anyone

wanted my autograph. But when I starred as the detective in *A Scream at Midnight*, a lot of people used to want it. I don't suppose you ever heard it, though, did you?"

"No, sir," Jupiter agreed. "It was a spooky radio show, wasn't it?"

"The spookiest," Gerald Watson said. "Used to open with a scream—Bert Clock did the screaming—and then went on to all kinds of weird mysteries. Bert and Rex King wrote it. I believe Bert suggested the plots and Rex wrote them. He was very good at puzzles and clues and so on. Well, well, that's ancient history.

"What are you here for, anyway, boys? Not selling magazine subscriptions, I hope?"

"We've come for a message that Mr. Clock sent you," Jupiter said. "He left another message saying to ask you for it."

"Oh, the message!" Mr. Watson quickly brightened up. "Yes, yes, of course. Out of the blue it came—haven't heard from Bert Clock in years, except for Christmas cards. Come in, come in. I'm sure I can dig up that message for you."

He led them into the house, into a neat and tidy room whose main feature was a big tape recorder and a shelf that held box after box of recorded tapes. From a desk drawer he drew an envelope. It had been opened.

"Here you are," Mr. Gerald Watson said. "I

opened it—curiosity got too strong for me. But I couldn't understand a word of it."

Jupiter took out the message and he and Pete examined it. It said:

Take one lily; kill my friend Eli.

Positively number one.

Take a broom and swat a bee.

What you do with clothes, almost.

Not Mother, not Sister, not Brother; but perhaps Father.

Hymns? Hams? Homes? Almost, not quite.

"Isn't that a dandy message?" Mr. Watson asked as they read it. "I tried to figure out what it means, but I didn't get anywhere. That first line—I never knew any friend of Bert's named Eli. Sounds as if he meant to kill Eli and put a lily on his chest, doesn't it?" He chuckled. "'Give it to anyone who comes asking for a message,' he said, and you did, and I have, so there it is. By the way, I don't think I know who you are."

"Oh, excuse me, here's our card." Jupiter gave him a Three Investigators business card. Mr. Watson studied it gravely, then shook their hands.

"Delighted to meet you," he said. "If you're interested in Bert Clock, perhaps you'd like to hear some of the old radio shows we did to-



Wally and Harry stood in front of a Police Officer
Reynolds Park

gether—the ones that started with him screaming. They were jim-dandies! Every time he screamed differently. And the plots! They don't write shows like that for television these days. All those boxes of tape you see—they hold every show I did with Bert Clock."

Pete and Jupiter were tempted. They knew that some of the old radio shows had been much spookier than anything on television now. But they really couldn't spare the time. So they said good-bye and went out to the waiting car, still puzzling over the message. Jupiter asked Worthington to take them back to The Jones Salvage Yard, and said to Pete, "I hope Bob and Harry will be there when we get back. If they managed to get a message, too, we'll put them all together and see if we can puzzle them out."

Bob and Harry, however, were not at Headquarters—at least not Headquarters for The Three Investigators. They were at the Rocky Beach police headquarters, being led into Chief Reynolds's office by the policeman who had arrested Harry for speeding.

"The chief says he knows you," the officer said to Bob. "But don't think you'll get away with anything. You speed-happy kids are a menace to decent citizens!"

He led them into an office where Chief Reynolds, a heavy-set man, sat behind a big desk covered with papers. The chief looked up.

"Well, Bob," he said, "I'm sorry to see you here. What Officer Zebert tells me sounds rather serious. Driving recklessly over the mountains could have killed both of you and maybe other people, too."

"Excuse me, Chief," Bob said. "We weren't driving recklessly. We were being chased by another car. It had just caught us when Officer Zebert came up, and the other driver got away."

"Being chased, eh?" The officer smiled knowingly. "You should have seen them going round those curves, Chief! Then they were racing side by side down Mountain Road. If anyone else had come along then, they would have all been killed."

"Now why should another car chase you?" Chief Reynolds asked. "Anyone could guess you wouldn't be carrying much money with you."

"We're on a case," Bob said. "We're investigating a mysterious clock."

"A mysterious clock!" It was Officer Zebert who spoke. "Did you ever hear such a crazy story, Chief?"

"It's true," Bob insisted doggedly. "We investigated a green ghost* once, Chief. You remember that time. You even asked us—that is, Jupiter Jones and Pete Crenshaw and me—to help you find out what it was."

* The Mystery of the Green Ghost

He was referring to a mystery which Chief Reynolds at the time had frankly admitted had him totally baffled. Now the chief nodded.

"That's true," he said. "Where is this clock and what's so mysterious about it?"

"It's in the car out back," Bob said. "If we could bring it in, we could show you why it's so queer."

"Right!" the chief said. "Zebert, go bring the clock here."

"It's in a zipper bag on the front seat," Bob said, as the officer departed.

"You know I want to believe you, Bob," the chief said as they waited. "But we've had so much speeding and reckless driving by teenagers that we have to do something about it—Here comes Officer Zebert. Did you find the clock, Zebert?"

The officer shook his head.

"Nothing there," he said. "The front seat's empty. No clock, No bag. Nothing."

Bob and Harry stared at each other.

"Golly!" Bob exclaimed. "The clock's been stolen!"

Questions—But No Answers

"I WONDER what's keeping Bob and Harry?" Pete said as Jupiter, at his desk in Headquarters, bent over the message from Mr. Watson. "I'll take a look outside and see if they're coming yet."

He went to the corner, where a length of thin stovepipe came down from the roof. From this Jupiter had fashioned a periscope which he called the See-All. Junk was piled as high as the roof around the trailer, hiding it from the outside world, and it was necessary to use the See-All to see over it.

Pete took a quick look and reported that Harry's car had just driven into the yard. A few moments later a code rap came on the trapdoor which opened into Tunnel Two. Pete lifted the trapdoor and Bob and Harry, looking rather tired, climbed into the office.

"Did you get the message?" asked Jupiter.

"We got a message, yes," Bob said. "But we can't understand it."

"May I see it?" Jupiter requested. "And do you have the clock?"

"Well, no, I don't have it." Bob looked unhappy.

Jupiter glanced at him sharply. "You've lost the clock?"

"It was stolen!" Harry blurted out. "While the car was parked at the police station."

"What were you doing at the police station?" Pete asked. "Did you run into something too big to handle?"

"We were arrested for speeding," Harry reported. "You see, coming over the hills someone started chasing us——"

Between them he and Bob told the story of their adventure. Bob finished up by saying, "Chief Reynolds finally let us go. He said he didn't know what we were mixing into, but if it was something important enough to be chased for, we'd better turn it over to the police."

"I don't think the police would really be interested in what we know so far," Jupiter said. "They would be inclined to call it some kind of joke. We ran into a little trouble, too."

He and Pete told of their encounter with Carlos and the little man, who, Jupiter now said, looked like a jockey or an ex-jockey.

"So you see," he said, "someone's interested in the clock and the messages. The clock was probably stolen by the same man who chased you

two. When he saw the officer taking you to police headquarters, he followed and took the clock from the car."

"But who would know about the clock and the messages?" Bob demanded. "That's what I don't see."

"Well, we know Mr. Jeeters knows about the clock," Jupiter said. "And he may have told someone else. And then there are Carlos and Gerald Cramer. We obligingly told them almost everything before we learned it was the wrong Gerald. So several people know quite a bit about our activities."

"Too much to suit me!" Pete grumbled. "Is that message Bob got as wild as the ones we have, Jupe?"

Jupe spread out the message Bob had handed him.

"It is equally incomprehensible," he said.

"Can't you just say it's a skullbuster?" Pete groaned. "Why be a walking dictionary?"

"All right," Jupiter agreed, with a slight grin. "It's a ring-tailed, double-barrelled skullbuster. Is that better?"

"Now you're talking my language!" Pete said.

"Now let's see if we can make any sense out of it," Jupiter went on. "First, Bob, give me a full report on your meeting with Mr. King and with Miss Imogene Taylor."

Bob did so, and Jupe listened carefully, making mental notes.

"So Mr. King is sick in the hospital," he murmured. "And Mr. Clock sent the clock to him thinking he would investigate and get all these messages and solve them—and then what? That's the question."

"The message pasted to the bottom of the clock said, 'Then act. You'll be glad you did'," Bob reminded him.

"Exactly," Jupiter said. "But why would he be glad? What would happen? It's up to us to find out. Now let's take the messages in order. The message Bob and Harry got from Miss Taylor is obviously first, so let's study it first."

He spread out the message and they all stared at it. It still said:

It's quiet there even in a hurricane.

Just a word of advice, politely given.

Old English bowmen loved it.

Bigger than a raindrop; smaller than an atom.

I'm 26. How old are you?

It sits on a shelf like a well-fed elf.

"I still don't see how that can be," Harry said. "Unless it's a code of some kind."

"It was intended for this Mr. King who's sick," Jupiter reminded them. "The clock was full of clues and puzzles. This was the first."

puzzle out. If he could do it, so can we."

"Speak for yourself," Pete said gloomily.

"At first glance," Jupe went on, "these peculiar sentences look something like the definitions of words in a crossword puzzle. My deduction is that each line means one word, and when we get all the words, we'll have a message six words long."

"But what words?" Pete wanted to know. "Where is it quiet even in a hurricane?"

"The best place to be in a hurricane is in a storm cellar," Harry said.

"Or a bank vault," Bob added.

"I don't know." Jupiter pinched his lip. "Maybe a bank vault would fit. We're probably talking about something valuable, you know."

"How do you figure that?" Pete demanded.

"Why go to so much trouble unless it's about something valuable?" Jupiter asked. "No, it's about something valuable and it could be in a bank vault. Now let's go on to line two. It says, '*Just a word of advice, politely given.*' Now, what other words are there for 'advice'? Pete, hand me that dictionary on the shelf."

Pete handed him the dictionary from a shelf of books, and Jupiter leafed through it.

"Here we are," he said, "'Advice: an opinion or recommendation to a course of action.' Let's see how that fits. Bank vault—opinion—. . . It doesn't sound right."

"It sure doesn't," Pete agreed. "If you want my suggestion——"

"Pete, stop!" Jupiter cried.

Pete stared at him. "Stop? Why? I was just going to tell you my suggestion——"

"That's it!" Jupiter told him. "Suggestion. A suggestion would be a polite way to give advice, wouldn't it? I think you've solved the line for us."

Pete blinked. "Then maybe it isn't so hard after all," he said. "Still, I don't make any sense out of 'bank vault—suggestion'."

"Neither do I," Jupiter agreed. "But we still have to get the rest of the words."

"The third line is, '*Old English Bowmen loved it,*'" Bob said. "But loved what? Bowmen were archers, they shot bows and arrows, so maybe they loved arrows."

"Arrows are plural, not singular," Jupe said. "Bowmen are also supposed to have loved a good battle."

"Bank vault—suggestion—battle!" Harry exclaimed. "That's worse than ever."

"I agree," Jupiter said, frowning. "But——" At that moment his aunt's voice came in through the open skylight.

"Jupiter! Dinner-time. We're closing up shop."

"I'll be right there, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said into a microphone that connected with a

speaker in his aunt's office. To the others he said:

"I guess we'll have to quit for the day. Harry, can you come back to-morrow?"

"I don't think so," Harry told him. "My mother needs me to help her round the house. Besides, I can't see that we're getting anywhere."

"Well, then we'll keep in touch with you," Jupiter answered. "You can keep an eye on Mr. Jeeters. Don't forget how Mr. Jeeters tried to get that clock from us. Maybe he was the one who followed you and Bob and stole the clock from the parked car."

"I'll keep an eye on him," Harry agreed. "I don't trust him. He's up to something."

"Meanwhile we three——" Jupiter began. He was interrupted again, this time by the ringing of the telephone. He picked it up.

"Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking," he said.

"Hello," said a voice he couldn't place at first. "This is Gerald Watson. You called at my home this afternoon for a message from Bert Clock."

"Yes, sir?" Jupiter answered.

"Well, I've been thinking it over and I just thought I ought to tell you—since you left me your card—about what happened after you left."

"Something happened?" Jupiter asked.

"Someone else came asking for the message,"

Mr. Watson told him. "A tall, dark-haired South American with a small friend. They said Bert Clock had sent them."

"But you couldn't give them the message," Jupiter said, puzzled. "You'd already given it to us."

"That's true," Mr. Watson said. "But they asked whom I had given it to and I showed them your card. They copied down your names. I began to wonder whether I had done the right thing. I didn't like them very much—that Carlos was too smooth a talker."

"It can't be helped," Jupiter said. "Thank you for letting me know, Mr. Watson."

He hung up and turned to the others.

"Carlos and Gerald Cramer know our names now," he said. "They undoubtedly want the messages and the clock. Mr. Jeeters wanted the clock. Some unknown person, maybe a third party we haven't met yet, actually stole the clock. There's an awful lot of interest in this mystery, and I wish I knew just what we're in the middle of."

Bob Finds More Clues

THE NEXT MORNING Bob was hurrying through breakfast to get to The Jones Salvage Yard when the telephone rang. It was Miss Bennett, the local librarian, asking if he could come in and spend half a day or perhaps more helping out. Bob had a part-time job at the library, helping mend damaged books, replacing books on the shelves, and other odd jobs.

He couldn't very well say no, though he hated to have Jupiter and Pete working on the mysterious messages without him. He told Miss Bennett he'd be there in twenty minutes, and set off on his bicycle.

Miss Bennett greeted him with relief, for her assistant was away that day. Bob plunged into work and was kept busy until lunch-time. Miss Bennett wanted him to stay for part of the afternoon, too, and Bob agreed. He quickly ate the sandwiches his mother had made so he could spend a few minutes doing some research.

On a hunch he decided to read up about hurricanes, for a hurricane was mentioned in the

had finally got everything in order, Pete and Jupiter flung themselves down, exhausted. Bob was a bit tired, too, but anxious to see how his research would help solve the messages.

"Listen," he said, "aren't we going to work on those messages?"

"I'm too tired to think," Pete moaned. "I'm too tired to move. Just go away and leave us alone, Bob. I don't even want to think about mysteries now."

"I can't think clearly either," Jupe admitted. "We'd better wait until to-morrow, Bob."

"But I have some clues!" Bob said. "Two of them. I think they'll fit."

"What's a clue?" Pete groaned. "I never heard the word."

"We can at least listen to what Bob has to tell us," Jupiter said. "All right, Bob, what have you learned?"

"Well," Bob said, "while I was at the library to-day I looked up hurricanes. And there's one quiet spot in a hurricane—the very centre of it. Away from the centre the wind may be blowing at a hundred miles an hour, but in the centre it can be perfectly calm, with the sun shining."

"Go on, Bob!" Jupiter said.

"The centre of a hurricane is called the eye!" Bob said triumphantly. "Get it? Eye is pronounced the same as the pronoun I! I'll bet that's the first word of the message."

He scared Harry. Harry told him we'd got some crazy messages that didn't mean anything. He also told him about someone stealing the screaming clock. That seemed to make Mr. Jeeters very angry."

"Mr. Jeeters knows something we don't," Bob said. "If we ever solve those messages maybe we'll find out what it is. Listen, Jupe, I learned——"

"Jupiter!" rang out Mrs. Jones's voice. "Step lively there! You haven't finished yet. Bob Andrews! I'm glad you're here. You can start listing all this stuff Titus bought. Make a nice neat job of it. I'll go in and get dinner."

She came over and shoved a big notebook into Bob's hands. It was a record of merchandise that had been added to the stock of The Jones Salvage Yard.

"Keep a careful account now, Bob," she said. "And I expect everything nice and neat before you boys stop. I'll call you when dinner is ready."

With that she left, and Bob began working again. Pete and Jupe stacked the newly acquired items and called them out.

"One rocking chair!" said Pete.

"One rocking chair." Bob wrote it down.

"One set of garden tools, rusty," called Jupe.

"One set garden tools, rusty," wrote Bob.

So it went on for nearly an hour. When they

had finally got everything in order, Pete and Jupiter flung themselves down, exhausted. Bob was a bit tired, too, but anxious to see how his research would help solve the messages.

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"Go on, Bob!" Jupiter said.

"The centre of a hurricane is called the eye!" Bob said triumphantly. "Get it? Eye is pronounced the same as the pronoun I! I'll bet that's the first word of the message."



"The only message I want to hear is 'Dinner ready'," Pete grumbled.

"I think Bob has hit on something," Jupiter said, rousing himself. "What's your other clue, Bob?"

"I also looked up archery and old English bowmen," Bob continued. "They used to use wood from the yew tree a lot in making the bows. So if we said that old English bowmen loved yew, we have another word. Y-e-w is pronounced exactly the same as y-o-u."

"Bob, I think you're right," Jupiter said, after a pause for reflecting. "Before Aunt Mathilda calls us to dinner, let's go into Headquarters and have another try at that message."

"Can't it wait until to-morrow?" Pete asked. But he got up and followed when Bob and Jupiter started towards Tunnel Two.

Five minutes later they were grouped round the desk with the first mysterious message spread out before them.

"The first line of the message says, '*It's quiet here even in a hurricane*,'" Jupiter read. "I think Bob's right, the word that is meant is 'eye.'" He wrote it down. "Now we already think that the line, '*Just a word of advice, politely given*' means 'suggestion'." He wrote that down, too. "So in the line, '*Old English bowmen loved it*' means 'yew', we have our first three words. Like this."

He wrote: *Eye suggestion yew.*

"That looks a little funny," he added, "but it makes perfectly good sense if we change the wording a little, and get *I suggest you*."

"I suggest you," Pete exclaimed, forgetting his weariness. "That does start out like a sensible message after all. Okay, Jupe, what's the fourth word?"

"The clue is, '*Bigger than a raindrop; smaller than an ocean*,'" Jupiter said. "Meaning some body of water smaller than an ocean. That could be a river, a pond, a lake or a sea."

"Sea!" exclaimed Bob. "Meaning s-e-e. That must be it. Now we come to the fifth clue, '*I'm 26. How old are you?*' That's tougher. What's 26 years old?"

"The suggestion of age is an attempt to mislead us." Jupe decided. "I'm sure that number 26 here means something that is twenty-sixth in a series of things. The most common thing that comes to mind as being number 26 is——"

"Let me try!" Pete spoke up. "There are 26 letters in the alphabet. Number 26 is the letter Z. Does that fit?"

"It does if we just use the sound of it," Jupiter told him. "Z sounds like 'the.' And 'the' fits into the message. Now we just need the last clue, '*It sits on a shelf like a well-fed elf*.' Any ideas, either of you?"

"I looked up elves at the library but I didn't find anything," Bob confessed.

"What sits on a shelf?" Pete asked. "Like an elf?"

"The word elf is just another word to confuse," Jupiter said. "Bob, you spent the whole day looking at shelves. Didn't it occur to you what was on them?"

"Books!" Bob yelled. "And every one of them is full of words. You could say they were well-filled—with words."

"I'm sure we have the message now," Jupiter said. "I'll write it out." He did, and got:

I suggest you see the book.

"Wow, we did it!" Pete cried. "But what does it mean? What book are we supposed to see? And when we see it, what do we do with it?"

"There are two more messages to be solved," Jupiter said. "When we——"

He was interrupted by Mathilda Jones's voice.

"Boys! Dinner! Come and get it!"

"I guess that means we have to stop now," Jupiter said reluctantly. "We'll try again tomorrow when we're fresh. We'll make better progress then, anyway."

So, leaving the mysterious messages for further work the next day, they went hungrily to dinner.

A Call for Help

DURING DINNER the boys discussed the meaning of the message they had just unravelled. It suggested they see a book. But what book? They had no idea.

"Could it mean the Bible?" Pete ventured. "That's known as the Good Book by a lot of people."

"I don't think so," Jupiter said, taking a second helping of dessert. "Though it might. Maybe the next message will tell us more."

"What project are you boys working on now?" Titus Jones asked from the head of the table.

"We have some mysterious messages to decipher, Uncle Titus," Jupiter said. "So far we've just made a beginning."

"You boys and that club of yours!" Mathilde Jones exclaimed, cutting another piece of cake for Pete. "I declare it's a good thing I give you some work to do and keep you out in the open air, or you'd spend all your time working puzzles."

awake he became. Sleep got further and further away. At last he came to a decision. He would have to try to solve the second message before he could get any sleep.

He got dressed again and went downstairs. His aunt and uncle were watching television, and they looked up in surprise.

"Mercy and goodness, Jupiter!" his aunt said. "I thought you were asleep."

"I started thinking about something," Jupiter said. "A—well, a sort of puzzle. I left it out in the salvage yard. I'm going to go get it and have a last look at it before I go to sleep."

"I certainly do hope you don't wear out your brains with all these puzzles," Mrs. Jones sighed.

Jupiter crossed the short distance to the front entrance of the salvage yard. The gates were padlocked; however, he had his own entrance which he used when necessary. He walked along the gaily painted fence until he came to two boards painted green.

Jupiter pushed his finger against a special spot, and the two boards swung silently back, revealing a narrow entrance. This was Green Gate One, one of several secret entrances and exits to the yard known only to The Three Investigators. Jupiter squeezed through and found himself in the special workshop section.

He now proceeded to the printing press, found the piece of iron grillwork at the back, and

it. The three middle letters of the two words spelled ELI!

Triumphantly Jupiter rubbed out the three letters, thereby "killing" Eli. What he had left was ONLY.

"Only!" Jupiter exclaimed to himself. "That's it! Now the second line says, '*Positively number one.*' In the first message, number twenty-six stood for the letter Z. Suppose number one stands for A? That fits fine. The message starts '*Only a—*'."

Without even stopping, he wrote down BROOM, from the third sentence, and erased the B, for the line said, '*Take a broom and swat a bee.*' What was left was the word ROOM.

Jupiter now working with increasing excitement, talking to himself as he sometimes did when working alone.

"'*What you do with clothes, almost.*' Well, what do you do with clothes? You wear them, naturally. What word is almost 'wear' but not quite? How about 'where'? That has to be it. Now the message is, '*Only a room where—*'. That makes sense so far."

He wrote it down, and then tackled the fifth line.

This gave him more trouble. He tried different words for father, such as "Dad," "Pop," "head of the family." But none of them made any sense.

He stopped and pinched his lip. Suppose the word father was meant to suggest something more. Father Christmas? No, that didn't seem to fit. Father Time? This whole business was about clocks, so that must be it. *Father Time!*

Now he dashed off the last line. What sounds almost, but not quite, like hymns, hams, and homes? There were only two likely words, hems and hums. Hems didn't fit. Hums did. With a feeling of triumph he wrote down *Only a room where Father Time hums.*

But time doesn't hum. It just passes by silently. Or if you mean a clock, it ticks by, unless——

"That's it!" Jupe exclaimed to himself. "All those clocks in Mr. Clock's study are electric, and they all hum. That's a room where time really hums."

Now he had two complete messages.

I suggest you see the book.

Only a room where Father Time hums.

The room had to be the room in Mr. Clock's house where all the screaming clocks were. He had no idea which book was meant. However, he might get some clue to that later. Now he took out the torn sheet of paper which contained the first part of the message they had obtained from Mrs. Martha Harris.

Jupiter studied the first line of numbers.

3-27 4-36 5-19 48-12 7-11 15-9

Ordinarily they wouldn't have meant anything at all to him. But since the messages he had already solved mentioned a book, he thought he understood. A very popular type of code message involves using a book. The sender of the message picks out words in the book which fit the message, then writes down just the page and the word number, and sends only the numbers to the receiver. The receiver of the message has a copy of the same book, and by looking up the page and word number he can easily read the message. These numbers almost surely referred to pages and words in some book.

Only Jupe didn't have a copy of the book, didn't know what book it was, and in any case only had half the page and word numbers!

But he had done enough for one night. He put the messages back in the desk and was about to let himself down into Tunnel Two when the phone rang. Surprised, he picked it up.

"Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking," he said.

"Jupe!" It was Bob's voice and he sounded scared. "Jupe, I'm in a bad jam. I need help!"

Bob in a Jam

RIDING HOME by himself, Bob did not notice the small van that was following him. But as they came to a block where there were no houses, it speeded up and passed him. It came to a stop and a boy jumped out.

"Bob!" he called.

Bob put on his brakes in surprise. It was Harry, and he looked very upset. Bob jumped off his bicycle and walked it up to Harry.

"What is it, Harry? Something wrong?"

The rear door of the van opened and a small wiry man jumped out.

"There'll be plenty wrong unless you obey orders," he growled. "Don't try to make a break for it."

"I'm sorry, Bob!" Harry's face twisted with unhappiness. "They made me stop you. They've got Mom locked up back at the house."

"Never mind the long explanations," the man snapped. "Just give me your bicycle and climb into the van. Move, now!"

Bob looked around quickly. There was no one on the street to call to for help. And it wouldn't be any use running—he couldn't run fast enough to get away.

The man grabbed his bicycle and gave him an impatient shove.

"Get into the van!" he said. "You, Harry, get in with him."

Bob climbed up into the dark van and Harry followed. The man pushed the bicycle in after them. The rear door slammed and locked. They were prisoners in the van.

"They swore they wouldn't hurt us, Bob," Harry said in a low voice. "All they want is information. About the messages and the clock. I couldn't tell them enough so they came to get it from one of you. They've been watching the salvage yard for a chance to grab one of you alone."

"But who are they?" Bob asked as the van rocked along towards some unknown destination.

"Mr. Jeeters is one of them. There are two others. One is a tall man named Carlos, and the other is the little man you saw. His name is Jerry. He used to be a jockey."

"Carlos and Gerald!" Bob exclaimed. "They're the two Pete and Jupiter saw yesterday afternoon, the ones who got part of one message from them."

"Yes, and that's stirred them up. They want to know what the message means," Harry said unhappily. "They're looking for something valuable and they're determined to find it. They think we have the clue to where it's hidden."

"If we do we don't know it," Bob said. "Jupe said, though, that he was sure something valuable was involved."

"Carlos and Jerry came to see Mr. Jeeters this afternoon. They had a long talk. Then they grabbed hold of me and made me tell them everything I knew. Gee, I'm sorry, Bob, but I had to. They're tough. They said that if I didn't co-operate in everything they wanted, my mother would suffer for it."

"You had to do it," Bob said. "Don't blame yourself. You say they've got your mom locked up?"

"Yes, back at Mr. Hadley's—that is, Mr. Clock's—house. They all call him Mr. Clock now. I heard them talking and learned that all the time Mr. Jeeters has been living in the house he's been hunting for a secret hiding place of some kind. Please promise to tell them everything you know, Bob, so they'll let us go and Mom will be all right."

"The trouble is, I don't know anything," Bob told him. "That is, we solved one message. But all it said was to see some book, and we haven't any idea what book. That's as far as we got."

"They'll be awfully angry," Harry said "They were sure you'd have solved the messages by now. They've been checking up, and they think you three guys are pretty smart."

"Jupe's the one who's smart," Bob sighed. "Maybe if I convince them I don't know anything they'll let us go. After all, it won't do them any good to hold us if we don't know anything, will it?"

On that hopeful note they fell silent. The van rolled along, making occasional turns, but they had no idea in which direction they were going. Finally, after what seemed a long time, it stopped. They heard a big door, like an overhead garage door, roll up. The van moved forward a few feet and stopped again. The door rolled down. Then the back of the van was unlocked and the little man, Jerry, spoke.

"Come on now, climb out, both of you," he said. "Act nice if you know what's good for you."

Bob went first, with Harry following. He stepped down on to a concrete floor and looked around him. They were inside a big double garage. The doors were tightly closed and the two windows, one on each side, had shades pulled down over them. A bare light bulb illuminated the place. The van was the only vehicle in the garage, but the other half of it was fitted up as a workshop, with a workbench, a blow-lamp and other tools scattered about.

There were several chairs beside the work bench, and Jerry pointed at them.

"Sit down," he said with an ugly grin. "Make yourselves comfortable."

They sat down. Mr. Jeeters, his long face pale and unpleasant in the overhead light, stepped out of the front of the van, followed by the dapper, smiling Carlos.

"A rope round them to hold them securely," Mr. Jeeters ordered Jerry. "Then we'll talk."

Deftly Jerry looped some rope from the work bench round their chests and tied them to the backs of the chairs. Mr. Jeeters drew up another chair, lit a big cigar, and puffed smoke at them.

"I assume Harry has told you what we want?" he asked Bob.

"He said you wanted to know the meaning of the messages," Bob said, his voice slightly shaky.

"That's just what we want. Those messages are the clue to the hiding place of something rather valuable," Mr. Jeeters growled. "We know all about how you got them—how you traced the screaming clock to Bert Clock and then to Rex King and tracked down the other with the messages Bert Clock sent them. Now we want to know what the messages say."

"Personally," Carlos put in, "I'd like to know the meaning of this nonsense of sending

screaming clock to Rex King, and messages to the others. What was Bert up to?"

"He's the only one that knows that," Jerry spoke up. "Bert has a very twisty kind of mind, believe me. He was always great at making a plan, then letting other people carry it out and take the risks. We'll never know exactly what he was up to until we find him, and he seems to have disappeared without any trace."

"Jerry's right," Mr. Jeeters growled. "No use wondering what Bert was up to. Let's concentrate on finding the loot. Now boy, no more fooling around. What did those messages say?"

Bob swallowed hard.

"Well, the first message," he said, "was, '*I suggest you see the book.*' That's all. Just the one line."

"I suggest you see the book." Mr. Jeeters swallowed his lip. "All right, what book?"

"I don't know. The message didn't say."

"The second message probably did." Mr. Jeeters was getting impatient. "What did the second message say?"

"I don't know," Bob gulped. "We didn't work on it. Everybody was tired so we decided to wait until to-morrow."

"Careful, boy!" Mr. Jeeters said, and his tone was menacing. "Don't lie to me! I want to know what that second message said!"

"I tell you I don't know!" Bob answered.

"We didn't work on it. We were going to tackle it first thing to-morrow."

"Maybe he's telling the truth," Carlos suggested.

"Maybe," Mr. Jeeters agreed darkly. "It's possible. All right, boy, let's get on to the third message. The one that's all numbers. I have part of it, the part that Carlos got from your fat friend."

He took a torn sheet of paper from his pocket and held it in front of Bob's face.

"What do these numbers mean?"

"I don't know," Bob had to say. "Jupiter didn't have any idea."

Mr. Jeeters was looking very ugly. However, he seemed to realize Bob was telling the truth, and so did the others.

"We should have waited," Carlos said. "But if we had, and these interfering boys had led the police to the hiding place, we could have done nothing about it. The question is, what do we do next?"

"Obviously," Mr. Jeeters growled, "we need the other messages. If these boys can solve them so can we. All we have to do is get our hands on the messages and we're set. Who has them, boy?"

"Jupiter Jones has them put away," Bob said. "And Jupiter is in bed by now."

"Well, he'll just have to get out of bed," Mr. Jeeters said grimly. "An idea is coming to me

"We'll just have your fat friend bring the messages to us and we'll all solve them together."

"How do you propose to get him here?" Carlos asked, looking thoughtful.

"He's fond of his friend, isn't he?" Mr. Jeeters asked, gazing at Bob. "He wouldn't want anything to happen to him. I'm sure he'll be glad to bring us the messages. Don't you think so, boy?" he asked.

"I don't know," Bob said miserably. He had been hoping that when Mr. Jeeters and the others learned he didn't know anything more about the messages, he and Harry would be released. Now they were planning to get their hands on Jupiter instead!

"I think he will," Mr. Jeeters said. "We'll get the same result, only it will take us a little longer. First we have to make sure your parents aren't worrying about you. You'll telephone them to say you are spending the night with your friend Jupiter. Then you'll phone your fat companion and tell him that if he wants to see you again, he'll have to follow orders without telling anyone.

"Jerry, hand him the telephone!"

The little man picked up the phone that sat on the workbench and thrust it at Bob.

"Take it, kid!"

"I won't!" refused Bob stubbornly. "I won't telephone anybody. I've told everything I know

and—and——” He swallowed hard, then finished, “And that’s that!”

“Jerry.” Mr. Jeeters glance went to the workbench. “I see a blowlamp over there. Light it and hand it to me.”

The small man did as requested. In a moment Mr. Jeeters held the blowlamp in his hand, a bright yellow flame hissing from it. He brought it towards Bob, until Bob could feel the heat on his face and had to close his eyes against the brilliant light.

“Now, my boy,” Mr. Jeeters said very softly, “would you rather telephone or would you rather have a blowlamp haircut? You have five seconds to make up your mind.”

16

An Unexpected Meeting

“JUPE, I’M IN A BAD JAM!” Bob’s urgent voice came over the telephone in Headquarters. “I need help.”

“What’s happened, Bob?” Jupiter asked tensely.

“Carlos and Jerry and Mr. Jeeters have me,” said Bob, “and they’ve got Harry, too.”

He went on to recount exactly what had happened. He finished by saying, "They made me call Mom and Dad and tell them I am staying with you to-night. Mr. Jeeters says you can ask your aunt and uncle for permission to come and visit me, and get away without anyone suspecting anything. He says that if you don't bring the messages to him, without telling anybody, we'll—well, we'll pay for it.

"But he swears that if you bring the messages, he'll let us all go as soon as they get what they want. Jupe, what do you think? Do you think you ought to do what they ask? Maybe you ought to call the police and——"

Over the phone there was the sound of a slap. Jupiter heard Bob gasp. Then Mr. Jeeter's voice came on the line.

"You heard your pal," he said. "If you want to see him again with nothing missing, like a couple of fingers or an ear, you do what I say. You get those messages and be waiting out front of that junkyard in exactly half an hour. I'm sending a van to pick you up. Don't tell anybody, you get me? That way you'll be all right in the end."

"All right, Mr. Jeeters," Jupiter said. "I shall obey orders to the letter. I will be waiting for your van in half an hour."

"You'd better," the man growled. Jupiter hung up very thoughtfully. He was tempted to

call Pete, but there was no use involving Pete if it wasn't necessary. Jupiter decided that probably Mr. Jeeters meant what he had said. If he got the messages and found whatever mysterious object he was looking for, he wouldn't have any reason not to let them go.

Jupiter put the messages—the two he had solved and the torn one he couldn't make anything of—in the pocket of his shirt. Then, just before he let himself down into Tunnel Two, he scrawled on a piece of paper, "*Look for us in the room of clocks,*" and put that on top of the desk. The message was—well, it was just in case. He was pretty sure the room of clocks was the centre of this mystery.

That done, he crawled out through Tunnel Two and started towards Green Gate One. He had just reached it when a dark shadow seemed to detach itself from a pile of junk and move towards him. Jupiter had very quick reactions and he flung himself against Green Gate One, trying to pop through it and get away. But he wasn't fast enough. A powerful arm went around his chest. A hand closed over his mouth, almost suffocating him. And a voice whispered mockingly in his ear:

"So! We meet again. And this time I think I have the advantage."

The voice had a slight French accent. Jupiter recognized it instantly. It was Hugenay, the in-



ternational art thief! The Three Investigators had encountered Hugenay, the debonair, clever European, once before, in an earlier case,* and Jupiter would never forget him. He still remembered with a little chill the fog-shrouded old graveyard where Hugenay had made him and Pete prisoners.

"I deduce," Hugenay whispered into his ear, "that you remember me. You know then that I am not a man to be trifled with. If I release you, will you remain quiet for a moment's conversation? I dislike making threats, but if you do attempt an outcry, I will have to—silence you."

Jupiter managed to nod his head. Seeming satisfied, Hugenay took his hand from Jupiter's mouth. By the faint light, Jupiter could just see the man's face. Hugenay was smiling slightly.

"You seem surprised to see me again," he said softly. "You should have realized that when half a million dollars in stolen paintings was at stake, Hugenay would not be far off."

"Stolen paintings?" Jupiter exclaimed. "Is that what we're all looking for?"

"You didn't know?" Now Hugenay seemed surprised. "Five wonderful canvases, with a total value of half a million dollars, stolen more than two years ago and lost ever since—that's what I'm after. Surely you must have known, or why go to so much effort?"

* The Mystery of the Stuttering Parrot.

"We were investigating a screaming clock," Jupiter said. "It led us to some clues and I guessed there was something valuable hidden, but I didn't know what it was."

"Oh yes, that clock," Hugenay answered. "I have been wondering about that clock. I have taken it completely apart——"

"You're the one who stole it?" Jupiter asked. "It was you who chased Bob and Harry yesterday?"

"Indeed it was," Hugenay told him. "I also had men following you, but the fools lost you. I got the clock when that officer so obligingly took your friends to the police station and they left it in the parked car outside. But I have taken it completely apart, looking for a clue of some sort hidden in it, possibly engraved upon the works, without finding anything. Now I must know what is in those messages your ingenious organization has recovered."

"Why should I tell you?" Jupe asked, his boldness returning. "If I yell now, Hans and Konrad will be here in a minute, and they'll tear you apart."

Hugenay chuckled. "I like spirit in a boy," he said. "However, it should stop short of utter rashness. I am not alone and—But why make threats? I have something to offer you for your co-operation. Help me, and I'll help you."

"Help me how?"

"The boy Harry whom you met at Bert Clock's house. His father is in prison. I will enable you to prove he is innocent. I will take the paintings—you will get an innocent man out of jail. Surely you won't refuse to do that?"

Jupiter thought furiously. Then he nodded. "All right, I'll help if you'll do that. But there's one thing more you'll have to do."

"And what is that, my plump but clever young friend?"

Jupiter told him exactly what had happened to Bob and what the situation was—that he was supposed to be picked up by a van in less than half an hour to take him to the place where Mr. Jeeters and the others had Bob and Harry.

Hugenay uttered a few expressive words in French.

"Those idiots!" he said. "I did not think they would act so swiftly. I planned to get the pictures and be gone before they could do anything!"

"You knew about them?" Jupiter asked, puzzled.

"Certainly I knew about them. I know far more than you think. I have been in the city for two weeks, casting about for a clue. I have—certain methods. If you wish, you may assume that I have had the telephone wires of these individuals tapped and listened to all their secret conversations—however, I will not

that. Obviously, though, there has been a change in plans to-day. We must foil those plans.

"Yes, boy, I will help you rescue your friends then we will find those paintings, and by this time tomorrow I will be five thousand miles away. You must start by following instructions. At the proper time you must be waiting outside for the van. Get in and go with the driver. I and my men will follow behind, discreetly. Leave the rest to me. The less you know, the better "

Realizing that he had to trust Hugenay, Jupiter eased out through Green Gate One and went back to his home. He was beginning to be a little sorry he'd ever thought of investigating a screaming clock, but it was too late to change things. Anyway, he knew that Hugenay was very clever and resourceful, and he felt sure that the Frenchman could outwit Mr. Jeeters and Jerry and Carlos.

Jupiter entered the house, where his aunt and uncle were watching television. He told them Bob had phoned and wanted to see him. They readily gave him permission to spend the night with Bob, and Juve went up to his room. He put on a warm jacket and thrust the messages into the inside pocket.

Downstairs, he said good night to his aunt and uncle and then walked out to stand in front of the main gates of the salvage yard.

Hugenay was waiting there for him. He came

over and put his hand on Jupiter's shoulder and spoke earnestly.

"Don't forget we're working together now," he said. "First we have to get Bob and Harry free. When the van comes, get in and don't give any sign you know I am following you. If in any way they get suspicious. I leave it to your cleverness to know what to say. Now I am leaving you."

He faded away into the darkness. If he had a car waiting, Jupiter could not see it. Possibly it was hidden at the other end of the salvage yard. Jupiter waited. It was very quiet and dark here beyond the outskirts of town, and he shivered a little.

Headlights cut the darkness. A small van came slowly down the street. For a moment the headlights shone clearly on him. The van stopped. The door opened and the little man, Jerry, leaned out.

"All right, kid, hop in!" he rasped. "And for your own sake, and your pals', you'd better not be trying any tricks!"

In the Hands of the Enemy

THE VAN MOVED steadily along in the direction of Hollywood. Carlos was driving, and Jupiter was squeezed in between him and Jerry.

"You have those messages with you, boy?" Carlos demanded.

"Yes, sir, I have them," Jupiter said, sounding unusually meek and humble.

"That's good," Jerry muttered. "Because if—what is it, Carlos?"

Carlos was staring into the rear-view mirror.

"I think we're being followed. There's been a car behind us for the last couple of miles!"

"Followed!" Jerry exclaimed. He grabbed Jupiter, hard. "Kid, if you called the cops——"

"No, sir, I didn't!" Jupiter sounded frightened, and only part of it was acting. They had spotted Hugenay's car, and the whole plan with Hugenay was in danger of failing.

"Then if it isn't the police, who is it?" Carlos demanded. "Quick, answer me! Don't stall or I'll know you're lying!"

"If we're being followed," Jupiter said rapidly,

"it might be somebody else who wants the messages, too. Somebody stole the screaming clock yesterday. If it wasn't you, that shows somebody else is interested, and that same person might have been watching my house and seen you pick me up. Naturally he'd want to know where I was going."

"That's it!" Jerry exclaimed. "That clock—Harry told Jeeters all about it. I'll bet the kid's right. Someone else is trying to find the loot. Carlos, you've got to shake them."

"Leave it to me," Carlos said grimly. "There's a freeway only a mile ahead and I'll get on to it. Then let them try to follow!"

He maintained the same speed for another couple of minutes. Then, as they approached the freeway, he put on speed, dashed up an entry ramp, and a moment later was in the midst of a stream of fast-moving traffic heading towards Hollywood.

The freeways of Los Angeles and Hollywood are a great network of concrete highways which connect the city of Los Angeles and the surrounding territory. A tremendous number of cars stream along them all day and most of the night. Now they were on a six-lane highway, and all six lanes contained cars and trucks moving at great speed.

Carlos stepped on the accelerator and began to cut in and out of the traffic. In a minute or

two anyone following would be hopelessly lost among the cars and huge trucks. Carlos, however, was not satisfied until he had been threading in and out of the dense traffic for ten minutes. Then he cut to the outer lane and swung sharply down an exit ramp.

He slowed as he hit the city street below them and watched the rear-view mirror intently. Apparently he was satisfied, for after a few moments he relaxed.

"Nobody followed us out of that exit," he said. "If anyone was tailing us, we've lost them."

As Carlos proceeded at a normal speed, Jupiter's spirits sank steadily lower. He had been counting on Hugenay. Now Hugenay had lost them, and could be of no help.

The van turned into a driveway between two old houses. In the rear was a large, two-car garage. Carlos peeped the horn once, and one of the sliding doors went up. The van eased inside and the door went down again.

Carlos and Jerry climbed out, hustling Jupiter along. Jupiter saw Mr. Jeeters waiting for them, and behind him Bob and Harry, tied to chairs.

"Any trouble?" Mr. Jeeters asked. "You're a little late."

"Someone followed us," Carlos reported. "We had to take time to throw them off the trail. The kid swears it wasn't cops. May have been who-

ever stole the screaming clock yesterday Anyway, whoever it was, we lost them."

"Good." Mr. Jeeters fixed hard eyes on Jupiter. "I'm sure our young friend here is too smart to have been trying any tricks. All right, boy, now the messages. Let's have them."

Jupiter fumbled in his pocket. He brought out a piece of paper.

"Here's the first message, Mr. Jeeters."

Jeeters took it and read it. "*I suggest you see the book.* Yes, your friend already told us that one. What book does it mean?"

"I don't know."

"Well, doesn't the second message tell us?"

"Here it is, sir. You can see what it says."

"Humph! *Only a room where Father Time hums.* What does that mean?"

"I deduce that it means Mr. Clock's library, where all those electrified clocks hum as they work."

"Yes, yes, of course, it has to mean that. But I've been all over that room, looking for sliding panels, concealed hiding places, anything, and I found nothing. Well, give me the rest of the third message. I already have half." And he displayed a torn piece of paper.

Jupiter was fumbling in his pocket when there was an unexpected interruption. With a great breaking of glass, the windows on each side of the garage crashed in. The shades flew up.

Seconds later a blue-uniformed man was climbing in through each window, each holding a large automatic pointed at Mr. Jeeters, Carlos and Jerry.

"Up with your hands!" the first policeman snapped. "Quick! No false moves!"

"The cops!" Jerry exclaimed. Carlos muttered something in Spanish whose meaning the boys did not know but could guess.

"Stand still! Put your hands up!" the second policeman ordered. "We have you covered from both sides."

Slowly Jerry and Carlos put up their hands. Mr. Jeeters backed up until he was against the workbench and for a moment it seemed as if he was feeling for a weapon behind him. But the first policeman covered him with his gun.

"You, too!" he snapped. "You—what're you doing? What's that burning?"

"He's burned the messages!" Jupiter exclaimed. The blowlamp was still burning on the bench with a low flame, and Mr. Jeeters had thrust all the messages into its flame. Even as they watched the bits of paper turned into curls of ash.

"Now, let's see you try to solve anything!" Mr. Jeeters sneered.

"I can remember the first two messages," Jupiter said. "But if the one with all the numbers

is gone, I don't know how we can ever find out what Mr. Clock was trying to tell us."

"Try your brains on that problem!" Mr. Jeeters laughed. He turned to Jerry and Carlos. "You fools!" he hissed at the other two. "You told me you had shaken off your tail. This fat kid called the police, and you let them trail you here——"

"But I didn't!" Jupiter blurted out, as astonished as anyone else by this new development.

"Keep them covered, Joe," the first policeman said.

He strode to the garage door and swung it up. A dapper-looking man stepped in, and the garage door swung down behind him. He stood smiling at the group before him.

"Well, well," he said. "Nicely done, men. The situation seems to be under control."

Jupiter's eyes bugged out.

"Mr. Hugenay!" he gasped.

Back to the Room of Clocks

"YES, MY BOY," Hugenay said. "It is I, the incomparable Hugenay, who has foiled the police

of three continents. You did not think I would let dullards like these get ahead of me, did you?"

Mr. Jeeters and his companions seemed to recognize the name, for they looked grim and nervous. They remained silent, however, waiting for developments.

"But—but——" Jupiter spluttered. "They lost you in the traffic. You couldn't possibly have followed us!"

"I took precautions," Hugenay said airily. He stepped up to Jupiter and slid a hand into the side pocket of Jupe's jacket. He brought out a small, flat object.

"This," he said, "is an electronic signalling device. I put it in your pocket the last time I spoke to you. In my car I have a receiver tuned to it. I simply followed the sound it emitted. Even in the traffic on the freeway I was able to follow, and I knew when the truck turned off. It took me a few minutes to trail the sound to this garage, but once I had located you, I simply sent my assistants in to take charge."

"Mr. Hugenay!" It was Bob who spoke now. Still tied to a chair, he had been staring at the art thief ever since he had entered. "It was you who chased us yesterday and stole the clock, wasn't it?"

Mr. Hugenay made a slight bow.

"I plead guilty. However, I intended no harm. I only wanted to, shall we say, help you in your

search? But this is no time for talking, pleasant though it is to meet old acquaintances again. Men, handcuff those three to that post."

A steel post rose in the centre of the garage to support the roof. Cowed by the policemen's guns, Mr. Jeeters, Jerry and Carlos stood with their backs to it while one of the blue-coated men manacled their wrists. The right wrist of each man was handcuffed to the left wrist of the man beside him, so that when the policemen had finished, the three made a circle around the steel post, quite unable to go anywhere.

"Very good," Hugenay said. "Now it is time for us to get on with our business."

"Wait a minute, Hugenay." It was Jeeters who spoke, and he was trying to sound pleasant. "Why don't we all throw in together? Between us we can probably find the stuff a lot quicker."

"I know everything you know," Hugenay said lightly. "You tried to get ahead of me and you must suffer for it. In any case, as you see I am working with the police now. All right, men, untie the boys and let's get started for Bert Clock's library."

A moment later the six were in a large black sedan, moving at a normal speed through the Hollywood streets.

Hugenay chuckled to himself as they rode along.

"My boy," he said to Jupiter, who sat beside

him, "no doubt you had given up all thought of ever seeing me again."

"Well, yes sir, I had," Jupiter admitted. "Especially after the police came through the windows. I never expected you to be working with the police."

Hugenay chuckled again. "The police? I merely rented two police uniforms at a costume shop to-day and presto!—I had two policemen for assistants. Do not be fooled by surface appearances."

Jupiter gulped. He *had* been fooled—just as much fooled as Carlos and the others. His reluctant admiration for Hugenay rose.

"Harry," Jupiter said to the boy who was squeezed in beside him, "we are co-operating with Mr. Hugenay. I agreed to do so if he would help get you and Bob free. He has done that. Also he has said he will do one thing more—he will prove your father is innocent."

"He will?" Harry exclaimed. "Golly, that's terrific!"

"It is simple, my boy," Hugenay said. "I will tell you the circumstances, Mr. Bert Clock, the former actor, has—if you have not already guessed it—been the brains behind a gang of art thieves that has been operating for years in this area, stealing valuable paintings from wealthy motion picture people who did not guard their well enough."

"Of course!" Bob said. "That's why Mr. Clock changed his name some years ago and has been acting so mysterious. He's a thief. I'll bet he stole those paintings that were hidden under the linoleum in Harry's kitchen."

"Perhaps he did not steal them himself," Hugenay said as they rolled along. "He had assistants to do that. Jerry, the former jockey, was one. He used several jockeys, because they are small men and can get through windows easily. He sold the pictures to wealthy South American collectors who would keep them safely hidden. Carlos was a contact with the South Americans."

"A couple of years ago, several paintings were stolen that Mr. Clock could not get rid of. Two of his best South American customers had just been put in jail after the failure of a plot to overthrow their government. So Mr. Clock hid the paintings, and told his men he would sell them later, when the time was ripe.

"However, he made no move and Jerry and Carlos decided to act on their own. They stole three paintings and brought them to Mr. Clock to sell, demanding that he also produce the five—yes, it was five—that were hidden.

"However, by one of those freakish coincidences with which life is full, the police investigating this latest art robbery turned their attention to someone in Mr. Clock's own house—your

father, Harry. Frightened lest they learn too much, Mr. Clock hid the three new paintings where the police would find them and blame your father."

"He framed my father!" Harry said bitterly. "And Mom and I always thought he was such a nice guy."

"Yes, he framed your father. Then, shortly after that, he vanished. I believe Carlos and Jerry and perhaps Jeeters were pressing him too hard. He didn't dare bring the missing pictures out of hiding, so he left for South America and hid himself. From everyone but me, that is. I have connections all over the world, if I may boast a bit.

"I contacted him, suggesting he let me have the pictures to handle—you see, I had made it my business to learn all about his activities—but he refused. He was sick, in fact he was dying, and he was feeling remorse about your father, Harry. He sent off the strange screaming clock and several messages to various old friends, and then he died."

"But *why* did he send the messages and the clock, Mr. Hugenay?" Bob asked. "Wouldn't it have been simpler just to write a letter to the police?"

"Bert Clock was never a simple man," Mr. Hugenay said. "He did it the way he did for some reason. Perhaps we will guess that reason

when we decode the strange messages."

"But Mr. Jeeters burned the messages," Jupiter reminded him. "He burned all of the first two and half of the third message."

"But naturally you remember them?" Hugenay asked, a trifle anxious.

"I remember the first two," Jupiter admitted. "But the third was all numbers. I couldn't possibly remember it. Anyway, I only saw it once, then Carlos got the bottom half from me. The first message said, '*I suggest you see the book*' and the second message said, '*Only a room where Father Time hums*'."

"Book?" Hugenay frowned. "What book, I wonder? The room where time hums is simple enough, of course. It can only be the room of many clocks. I assumed all along our starting point would be there. Well, here we are. Once we are inside we can ponder the message further."

The car stopped at the kerb. They all got out and walked up the path to the home of Bert Clock. Harry let them in and went to look for his mother.

As he called her name, they heard a pounding on the cellar door. He quickly unlocked it and Mrs. Smith emerged.

"Thank goodness you came, Harry!" she said. "That awful Mr. Jeeters and his friends! They locked me in the cellar and said I'd have to stay

there until they got back. I see you have some policemen with you. Well, I want them arrested right away!"

"They have been taken care of, madam," Mr. Hugenay said, making a bow. "Indeed, we are here on business that vitally concerns you."

"This is Mr. Hugenay!" Harry said excitedly. "He says he can prove Dad is innocent."

"Really? That's wonderful!" his mother exclaimed.

"In order to do that," Mr. Hugenay said, "we must be allowed into Mr. Clock's—or Mr. Hadley's if you prefer the name he used—library. We may have to do some damage. I assure you it is necessary to prove your husband innocent. Have we your permission?"

"Yes, of course. Anything!" Mrs. Smith said happily. "Tear the house down if it will clear Ralph."

"Now I shall ask you and Harry Bob to remain outside the library while I my men are at work. You will communicate with no one. If the telephone rings, do not answer it. Is it agreed?"

"Yes indeed. The boys and I will stay in the kitchen and have a bite to eat—I haven't eaten for hours. Go right ahead, Mr. Hugenay."

"Thank you," Hugenay said and turned to Jupiter. "Lead us to the library, my boy."

book, obviously," he said. "But meaningless without the proper book. Boy, what book do you think it might be?"

"I haven't any idea, sir," Jupiter replied. "Though it's probably a book in this room somewhere."

"Yes, I think so, too. Let us look at a few."

Hugenay went to the nearest shelf, pulled out three or four books and glanced through them. He thrust them back.

"Pah!" he said. "They mean nothing. There are too many books to look at every one. Yet we must have the message. Think, boy, think. You're supposed to be good at thinking."

Jupiter pinched his lip to make his thoughts come faster.

"Mr. Hugenay——" he said at last.

"Yes, boy?"

"These messages were meant for Rex King. He was supposed to solve them. Therefore it seems logical that he would know what book Mr. Clock meant."

"Of course he'll know! We only have to telephone him and ask him."

"But he's in the hospital."

"That is bad." Hugenay's face fell. "Try another idea."

"We could ask his wife. She might know."

"Of course. Sound thinking. Phone her and ask her."

"I'd better have Bob ask her," Jupiter said. "He talked to her."

He led the way to the kitchen, where Bob was having cocoa with Mrs. Smith and Harry.

"Find anything, First?" he asked.

"Not yet. We need your assistance." Jupe explained what he wanted Bob to do. Bob went to the telephone in the hall, looked up Rex King's number, and dialled. He recognized Mrs. King's voice when she answered.

He told her about the mysterious book Bert Clock had referred to in the message. It was probably a book that her husband would have known about. Could she suggest any book which Bert Clock would have referred to as *the* book?

"Yes, I think so," Mrs. King said. "A good many years ago, Bert wrote a book about his experiences in radio. My husband helped him some with the writing. It was called *A Clock Screams at Midnight*. Does that help?"

"It certainly does!" Bob exclaimed. "Thank you very much." He hung up and relayed the news to Jupiter and Mr. Hugenay. They whirled back into the library and closed the door. Bob went back to the kitchen to wait some more, wondering what this new development would uncover.

After a couple of minutes of scanning the shelves, Hugenay snatched up a book.

"Here it is," he said. "*A Clock Screams at Midnight*, by Albert Clock. Now we are making progress. Where is that message? Let me see—page number 3, word number 27. I will look for it. You, boy, write the words down as I proceed."

He leafed through the book to page 3 and counted words.

"The word is '*stand*,'" he reported. "Now for the rest."

He worked rapidly. Jupiter wrote down each word as they found it.

Presently Hugenay came to the end of the torn message. "That's all," he said. "The rest of the message is gone. Read what we have."

Jupiter read the message aloud. "*Stand in the middle of the room at one minute to midnight. Have two detectives and two reporters with you. Hold hands, making a circle, and keep absolutely silent for one minute. At midnight exactly—*" He stopped. "That's where the message ends, Mr. Hugenay."

"A thousand thunders! It ends just before it tells us anything. At midnight exactly—*what*? What is supposed to happen? There's no way to tell. That Bert Clock had a very clever mind. We can't guess what he was thinking."

He sighed. "There's nothing for it," he said. "We'll just have to tear the room apart. Either the pictures are hidden in this room, or perhaps

there's a key to a storage vault hidden here. It would help if we knew what we were looking for but, as we don't, we'll make the best of it."

"Wait, Mr. Hugenay!" Jupiter said. "Could the pictures be those pictures on the wall? I mean, could the real pictures have had new pictures painted over them?"

"No, no, I'm sure that's not the case, but I'll look."

Hugenay took down the nearest picture and examined it closely. He scraped the paint at one corner with his penknife.

"No, just a worthless picture," he said. "We'll start by leafing through all the other books, to see if there is a concealed key. Then we'll examine the walls and the bookcases for hidden cupboards or sliding panels."

"Wait!" Jupiter pleaded. "I've had another idea, sir."

"Another? Your mind hums like a top!" Hugenay exclaimed. "What is it this time?"

"I think I know of a way we might get the rest of the message in the book, sir."

"Well, then let's have it!"

"When people pick out words in a book to make a message," Jupiter said, "they often put a pencil mark beneath the word to help them count down to it. If the message words in Mr. Clock's book have pencil marks under them, we can find the rest of the message by looking

through the book till we see more words marked with pencil."

"Remarkable cogitation," Hugenay said. "Let us check and see."

Quickly he looked through Mr. Clock's book again.

"You're right, boy! Each word of the message has a small pencil dot beneath it. Here—you look for the rest of the message."

Jupiter took the book and turned each page slowly, looking only for a tiny pencil dot. Presently he came to a word. He called it out and Hugenay wrote it down. It took quite a while to go through the book page by page, but Jupiter was interested in the job and did not pause.

At last Jupiter could find no more marks.

"Very well," Hugenay said. "I'll read the whole message. *'Stand in the middle of the room at one minute to midnight. Have two detectives and two reporters with you. Hold hands, making a circle, and keep absolutely silent for one minute. At midnight exactly the alarm of the screaming clock which I sent you should go off. Have it set at full volume. Let the scream continue until my hiding place is uncovered'.*"

Mr. Hugenay looked at Jupiter.

"What do you suppose it means?" he asked.

Jupiter frowned. It was one of the strangest messages he had ever encountered.

"It sounds to me," he said, "as if the scream-

ing clock will make some kind of mechanism work that will open a hidden panel, or something like that. Locks can be made that will open only at special sounds. Some will open only if the owner speaks to them. I think Mr. Clock's scream must do something like that."

"Exactly," Hugenay agreed. "My own conclusion. A trick lock opened by a special sound."

"Now," Jupiter said, "if you have the clock, we can try it out. I don't think that business about holding hands or waiting for midnight means anything. It's just atmosphere."

"There is, unfortunately, a difficulty," Hugenay said slowly. "The clock no longer exists. I took it apart looking for a hidden message engraved inside it. It won't scream any more." He sighed. "I did not anticipate this. It is one of the few times I have been guilty of a grave error. But it can't be helped. The clock is gone."

"Then," Jupiter said, "I don't know what we can do."

"There is a way," Hugenay said. "It is crude and I detest crudeness, but this time it is necessary. My men will open up all the walls in this room, including those behind the bookcases. If there is a secret cupboard or other hiding place we will find it."

"Fred," he said to one of his men. "Go out to the car and bring in the tools. We have work to do."

Startling Developments

MR. CLOCK'S LIBRARY was a mess. It looked as if a bomb had exploded or a demolition squad had started to demolish the house. The latter was almost correct. Certainly Hugenay's men had wrecked the room. They had attacked it with chisels, drills, axes and crowbars.

First they had removed all the books from the shelves, stacking them on the floor, and taken down the pictures and mirror. Then they had opened up the walls, methodically. They had examined every section of the room for an opening behind the wall. They had ripped down some of the bookshelves looking for a secret door, or a hidden closet. They had even attacked the ceiling until they found it was solid plaster.

All of their efforts had ended in failure. They hadn't found anything remotely resembling a secret hiding place.

Hugenay looked angry as well as disappointed. "Well," he said. "We have failed. Bert Clock has hidden something so well I cannot find it. I would not have believed it possible."



THEY SAID THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING A SECRET

ABOUT THE CASE

"Does that mean you can't prove Harry's father is innocent?" Jupiter asked.

"Not without finding the stolen pictures, boy," Hugenay replied. "And as you can see, we have not found them. Unless you have some more ideas."

Now Jupiter was pinching his lip. An idea was coming to him.

"Mr. Hugenay," he said. "The clock is destroyed, but maybe the scream isn't."

"What do you mean by that?"

"There's a man, a Mr. Gerald Watson, who has a collection of tapes of all the radio shows Mr. Clock did in the series, *A Scream at Midnight*. Each of them starts with a scream. Maybe this particular scream is recorded on one of the tapes. If it is and we can borrow the tape and tape recorder from Mr. Watson, we don't need the clock."

"Call him at once. Time is important!"

Jupiter went out and called Mr. Watson. Mr. Watson was puzzled at first, but he quickly recognized the scream Jupiter described.

"I know the very one you mean, yes indeed. My goodness, that scream made Bert famous, in an old film twenty years ago. Of course I have it on a tape. I can put my hands right on it. I'll be glad to lend you the tape and the recorder, but I insist, you must tell me later what this mystery is all about."

Jupiter promised and said a man would be right over and hung up. Bob and Harry and Mrs. Smith came out of the kitchen to listen, and were startled when they saw the mess in the library.

"Golly, Jupe, you've really wrecked that room!" Bob said. "Did you find anything?"

"Not yet," Jupiter admitted.

"Why, it looks as if you're trying to tear the house down!" Mrs. Smith exclaimed. "I'd never have given you permission if I'd known you planned to do so much damage!"

"We are looking for evidence that will prove your husband innocent," Mr. Hugenay told her. "Do you wish us to stop without finding it?"

"Well, no, no, of course not," Mrs. Smith answered, flustered. "If you can prove he's innocent, I guess it's worth any amount of damage."

"We will try to do no more." Hugenay made a little bow, and she seemed satisfied.

They had already dug into all the walls looking for a hiding place, so now there was nothing to do but wait. The man named Joe had gone in the car for the tape recorder, and in about an hour he returned, lugging the heavy machine.

"Here it is," he said. "The old fellow put the tape on, so it's all ready to roll."

"Very well," Hugenay said. He turned to Jupiter, "Do you know how to run this apparatus?" he asked.

"Yes, sir." Jupiter opened the carrying case of the tape recorder, got out the electric connection, and plugged it in.

"Let's put the room back the way it was," he said. "I mean we can't really do it completely, but let's hang the pictures and the mirror and put some books back on the shelves."

Hugenay started to protest, but reconsidered.

"Do it, men," he said, and they obeyed instructions. They rehung the mirror and pictures, arranged some of the books in the bookcases, and stepped back, waiting.

"Now, some action, please!" Hugenay said impatiently. "I think we are wasting time, but let us at least try."

"Yes, sir." Jupiter had been running the tape at low volume, listening to it while the men worked. He had located the place on the tape where the scream came, and wound the tape back.

"Now I'm ready," he said. "Everyone please remain quiet."

He started the tape and turned up the volume. There were a few words of conversation between a man and woman. Then the scream came, high-pitched, desperate, and eerie. It rang through the room, and with a last despairing wail was silent.

All of them waited for a secret door to open or a panel to pop out of the wall.

Nothing whatever happened.

"I knew it!" Hugenay exclaimed. "I tell you, boy, there's no place in this room five valuable pictures could be hidden. No place!"

"I think there is, sir," Jupiter said, with sudden eagerness. He had noticed something the men hadn't and suddenly he thought he knew where the stolen pictures were hidden. It only remained to test his theory.

"Let's try it again," Jupiter said. "Perhaps the volume wasn't high enough."

He pushed the volume knob all the way round. Then he rewound the tape and started the scream once more.

This time it burst upon them as a screech of such terror that they put their hands over their ears. Up, up, up went the sound of the scream until it was almost unbearable.

Then it happened.

The glass in the large mirror on the wall cracked in a thousand pieces. Glass sprayed across the floor. In a second there was nothing left of the mirror but the frame and a few jagged pieces of glass sticking to it.

Where the mirror had been was a brilliantly coloured picture. As they watched, it curled forward and fell to the floor, followed by four more pictures that had been carefully sandwiched between the glass and the frame.

The purpose of the screaming clock was at last explained.

Heedless of the broken glass, Hugenay darted forward to snatch up the first picture, an abstract consisting of whirls of colour against a black background.

"The pictures!" he exclaimed in triumph. "Half a million dollars' worth, and at last I have them!"

At that moment, the library door opened, and a voice behind them said sharply, "Put up your hands! You're all under arrest!"

There was stunned silence as they all turned and stared at the group of men in the doorway. Two policemen stood with drawn revolvers. Behind them Jupiter recognized Police Chief Reynolds of Rocky Beach, and Mr. Crenshaw, Pete's father. Then Pete himself squirmed through the group into the room.

"Jupe!" he said anxiously. "Are you all right? Golly, we were worried about you! I couldn't get to sleep—I wanted to tell you something—so I telephoned your house. Your uncle said you were at Bob's, and Bob's mother thought you both were at your house, Jupiter. I called Headquarters, and you weren't there either. Then I rode over to Headquarters to see if you had left any message. I found your note about the clock room, so I telephoned here, but nobody answered.

"Then I got worried. I told Dad you and Bob were missing and he called Chief Reynolds. We all came here to investigate and it looks like we came just in time."

Chief Reynolds stepped forward and took the picture which Hugenay was holding. He carefully placed it on the desk.

"This was stolen from a gallery about two years ago," he said. "I remember, photographs of it were circulated to police at the time."

He turned to Jupiter.

"I had a hunch this might be serious," he said. "I remembered about Bob being chased yesterday and something stolen from his car and figured you might be tangling with something big. Looks like we got here just in time to catch the thieves with the stolen goods."

Jupiter turned and looked at Mr. Hugenay. When he learned that the art thief had just been captured after outwitting police for many years, he looked very calm. He was in fact smiling. Now he lowered his hands, took a cigar from his pocket and lit it.

"Tell me, please," he said, "with what crime am I charged?"

"Well, possession of stolen goods will be enough to start with," Chief Reynolds snapped. "Then maybe abduction, malicious damage—oh, we've got you on a lot of charges."

"Indeed?" Hugenay puffed on his cigar and

blew out a cloud of smoke. "Please do not make reckless accusations, my dear fellow. I came here in a public-spirited hunt for some stolen art treasures that had been hidden by Albert Clock. This boy——" he nodded at Jupiter, "will tell you that he and his friends were aiding me voluntarily with my search.

"The damage to this room was done by permission of the lady in charge of the house. It was necessary to find the stolen paintings. We have found them. We will now turn them over to you, gentlemen, and take our leave."

"Now wait a minute——" Chief Reynolds began.

"Tell them I am speaking the exact truth, boy," Mr. Hugenay requested of Jupiter.

Jupe blinked. It was true, of course, everything Hugenay had said.

"Yes, Chief Reynolds," Jupiter said reluctantly. "We are here voluntarily and Mr. Hugenay was hunting for the hidden pictures. That's all absolutely true."

"But we know all about him. He was going to keep them when he found them!" Chief Reynolds cried.

"That is a matter of opinion," Hugenay said. "You cannot prove it. So if you will excuse us, we will take our leave now. You will not arrest us, I'm sure, because if you do I will file a suit

for a million dollars for false arrest and I will win it."

He gestured to his men, who were still holding their hands up nervously.

"Come on, men," he said. "We are no longer needed here. We will say goodnight."

"Now wait a minute!" one of the policemen exclaimed. "You can't slip out as easily as all that. We can hold these men for impersonating police officers, anyway!"

"Really?" Mr. Hugenay yawned slightly. "Fred, please step forward. Now, gentlemen, examine the insignia Fred is wearing. Notice the initials."

"N-Y-P-D!" Chief Reynolds said, puzzled.

"Correct. Standing for New York Police Department. These men are actors, whom I hired to help me in this hunt. They are wearing uniforms of the police department of the City of New York, which is almost three thousand miles away. It is merely a harmless joke on my part. You can't say that they are impersonating Los Angeles police officers—not when they are wearing New York City police uniforms!"

Jupiter gulped. Now that he looked closely, it was true. Along with everyone else, he had taken it for granted the men were dressed as Los Angeles policemen.

"Come, gentlemen," Hugenay said and started

calmly towards the door. Chief Reynolds scratched his head.

"~~Darned~~ if I can think of anything to arrest them for!" he said, in frustration. "I guess we'll have to let them go."

Jupiter shook his head admiringly. Hugenay hadn't got the pictures he had been after, but he was certainly making a clean getaway once again.

At the doorway, Hugenay paused. He looked back at Jupiter.

"It was a pleasure working with you, my boy," he said. "I am only sorry we can't work together professionally. With my training you would have a great future. Still, I am sure we will meet again some day."

In a moment the outer door opened and closed and Hugenay and his men were gone. Chief Reynolds was still scratching his head.

"Well," he said, "I think it's time for some explanations. Jupiter, just what is this whole thing all about?"

Jupiter drew a deep breath.

"Well, Chief Reynolds, it all started with a screaming clock. You see——"

And he talked for quite a long time.

Alfred Hitchcock Speaking

IT IS NOT necessary to relate all that Jupiter Jones told Chief Reynolds and the others. However, you might be interested in a few details that emerged before the case was officially closed.

The stolen pictures which had caused Harry's father's arrest had been put under the linoleum by Mr. Clock himself, who was afraid the police might suspect him unless they had someone else to pin the guilt on. As soon as he safely could, Mr. Clock had then left the country and gone into hiding in South America. He wanted both to get away from further police attention and to escape from Carlos, Jerry and Mr. Jeeters, members of the gang that had stolen the pictures who were pressing him to resume activity again.

Mr. Clock had died of an illness in South America, as Hugenay had reported, so it was impossible to bring him to justice. As for Carlos, Jerry and Mr. Jeeters, they were taken into custody in the garage where they had been left handcuffed. They admitted their part in the burglary ring, and cleared Harry's father of any guilt whatever. He was released from prison, and reunited with his family.

The trick that Sam Clock did in the old film, and which both Pete's father and Mr. Watson remembered, was to shatter a mirror by screaming in front of it in high-pitched tones. The vibrations caused by certain sound waves can shatter thin glass, and this made a very dramatic scene in the film.

Mr. Clock had obtained a similar mirror later and hung it in his library. He used it as the hiding place for stolen pictures until they were sold. The five he could not sell he left there, as it was the safest hiding place he knew. His reasons for wanting the mirror can only be guessed. It is my belief that he enjoyed knowing he could shatter the glass with a scream any time he wanted to, and perhaps intended to do it some day to amaze a group of friends.

It was this trick Mr. Crenshaw had told Pete about, and which Pete thought Jupiter should know of. As Pete said, he had been unable to sleep and tried to telephone Jupiter, and finding both Jupiter and Bob unaccountably missing, had raised the alarm.

Jupiter was inclined to be annoyed at himself for not guessing that a large mirror could easily conceal several small pictures, but Bob and Pete pointed out to him that he had so brilliantly succeeded in other phases of the investigation that he could be pardoned for not realizing this final point.

In fact, when Jupiter turned on the tape-recorded scream for the first time, he noticed the mirror shiver slightly and guessed what was supposed to happen. By turning up the volume, he was able to shatter the mirror in a dramatic enough manner to satisfy even him.

One point remains. Why did Mr. Clock send the strange messages to three friends, and the screaming clock to the writer, Rex King, instead of just writing to the police? Mr. King himself supplied the answer, which I am sure is the correct one.

To use Mr. King's own words, "Bert knew I was down on my luck and hadn't had a job for a long time. Here in Hollywood publicity is very important. I needed something to get my name in the papers, where movie and television producers would see it and remember me.

"He dreamed up a scheme whereby I would find the missing pictures in a very dramatic fashion, which would be in all the newspapers. After all, if I hadn't been in the hospital when the clock came, I could easily have contacted the others, solved the messages, and taken some reporters and detectives to witness me finding the pictures. It would have been a big story, and I'd have got plenty of publicity.

"Bert was a good friend, even if he was a thief, and the last thing he did was try to do me a favour, so I can't think too badly of him. I'm

only sorry it didn't work out the way he planned, because I could use the publicity."

You'll be pleased to know, I'm sure, that the stories in the newspapers did carry Mr. King's name, and that he got several jobs as a result.

As for The Three Investigators, they have put this case in their *Closed* file and are looking for a new one. I can only wonder what it will be!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK.



A Message from Alfred Hitchcock

It is a pleasure to welcome you on the set of the latest mystery starring those three lads who call themselves The Three Investigators. In the event that you have not become acquainted with them in their previous appearances, allow me to introduce Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw, and Bob Andrews, all of Rocky Beach, California, not far from the fabled city of Hollywood.

Some time ago the three formed the detective firm of The Three Investigators to solve any mysteries that came their way. Head of the firm is Jupiter Jones, who is known for his logical mind, his cool head, and his stubborn refusal to let any riddle get the better of him. The Second Investigator is Pete Crenshaw, whose athletic skill serves the firm well in times of danger. The third and most studious member of the trio is Bob Andrews, who attends to research and record keeping. The firm makes its headquarters in a mobile home trailer hidden away in The Jones Salvage Yard, run by Jupiter's aunt and uncle.

"We Investigate Anything" is the boys' motto, and this time they prove it by journeying to a ranch in the California mountains to look into a cave that moans, a legendary bandit who refuses to stay dead, and some very strange happenings in a deserted valley. What they find will keep you biting your finger-

nails on the edge of your chair if you are the nervous
type, so beware!

And now, enough of a preview. The case is about
to unfold. Lights! Camera! Action!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK



came again. He listened carefully, his hand cupped behind his ear.

Pete stared, puzzled. "What are we doing, Jupe?"

Jupiter didn't answer. Instead he turned and walked almost a hundred yards in the opposite direction.

"Are we just going to walk all over this ridge, Jupe?" Bob asked, as puzzled as Pete by Jupiter's strange actions.

Before Jupiter could reply, another eerie moan floated through the valley. "Aaaaaaaaahhhhhh—oooooooooooo—oooo!"

Jupiter turned to them. "No, Bob, we've completed the experiment."

"What experiment?" Pete blurted out. "We haven't been doing anything but walk!"

"We have listened to the moan from three different points on this ridge," Jupiter explained. "In my mind drew imaginary lines from where I listened to where the moans appeared to originate. Where the three lines crossed is the exact source of the sound."

Bob suddenly understood. "Sure, Pete," he said. "It's called triangulation. Engineers use it all the time."

"Precisely," Jupiter said. "Of course, the way I did it was very rough, but it will serve our purpose."

"What purpose, Jupe?" asked Pete. "I mean, what did we find out?"

"We have found that the exact source of the sound is that cave in the mountain—El Diablo's Cave," Jupiter announced.

"Gee, Jupe," Pete exclaimed, "we knew that already. Mr. and Mrs. Dalton told us."

Jupiter shook his head. "Good investigators do not accept what other people report without checking it themselves. Witnesses are often unreliable, as Mr. Litchcock has told us many times."

Jupiter referred to the motion picture director, Alfred Hitchcock, who been a good friend of The Three Investigators ever since they had embarked on their adventures by trying to locate a haunted house for him to use in a film.

"I guess you're right," Pete said. "Mr. Hitchcock did show us how little witnesses really see."

"Or hear," Jupiter added. "But now I have no doubt that the moaning does come from El Diablo's Cave. All we have to do is find out what is moaning, and——"

The stocky boy did not finish his sentence, for the moan rolled out once more—weird and chilling in the deep twilight of the shadowy valley. "Aaaaaa-hhhhhh—oooooooooooooooo—oooooooo—oo!"

Even Jupiter shivered this time, as long shadows began to creep across the valley.

Pete swallowed hard. "Gosh, Jupe, Mr. Dalton and the sheriff have searched the cave three times already. They didn't find anything."

"Maybe it's some kind of animal," Bob volunteered.

"It doesn't sound like any animal I ever heard," replied Jupiter, "and, anyway, the sheriff and Mr. Dalton would have found traces of any normal animal. They're expert hunters and trackers."

"Any *normal* animal?" Pete repeated uneasily.

"Maybe it's some animal, no one knows is here," Jupiter said. "Or maybe," and the First Investigator's eyes sparkled, "it's El Diablo himself!"

"Oh, no you don't!" Pete cried. "We don't believe in ghosts—do we?"

Jupiter grinned. "Who said anything about ghosts?"

"But El Diablo's been dead almost a hundred years," Bob objected. "If you don't mean a ghost, Jupe, what do you mean?"

Jupiter did not get a chance to answer, for at that moment the sky beyond the valley was suddenly lit up by bright red flashes. The boys' eyes widened as explosions seemed to shake the whole valley.

"What is it, Jupe?" asked Bob.

Jupiter shook his head. "I don't know."

The flashes stopped and the echo of the explosions faded away. The three boys looked at each other. Then Bob snapped his fingers.

"I know, it's the Navy! Remember when we were coming up on the truck, Jupe, we saw all those Navy ships on practice manoeuvres? I'll bet they're having target practice out in the Channel Islands."

Bob laughed with relief. "Sure, they do that a lot of times a year. I read about it in the news-papers. They fire at some uninhabited island out there."

Jupiter nodded. "It was even in the papers yesterday about firing practice. Come on, I want to get to the ranch and find out more about this."

Bob and Pete needed no urging for the valley had become completely dark now. The three boys walked to their bikes, which were parked on the dirt road behind them.

Suddenly, from across the valley, they heard a loud booming sound, followed by a long wail.

Old One

The rail died away across Moaning Valley. "That wasn't the moan from the cave!" cried Pete. "No," Jupiter agreed. "That was a man!"

"In trouble," added Bob. "Come on, fellows!"

The sound had come from the base of the mountain that stood between the valley and the ocean—Devil Mountain, so called because of its jagged two peaks shaped like horns.

The boys raced across the valley to the foot of Devil Mountain, where a pile of newly fallen rocks lay strewn across the slope. Dust still filled the air.

"Help!" a voice called feebly.

Pete knelt down beside the grey-haired man who lay there, his leg twisted at a strange angle beneath the rocks, his face contorted with pain. "Just lie quietly," Pete told him. "We'll get you out of here right away."

Pete stood up and looked at Jupiter. "I think his leg is broken. We'd better go for help quickly."

The man on the ground was dressed in the old worn clothes of a ranch hand. He gritted his teeth as he spoke.

"You boys go to The Crooked-Y ranch house. Work there. Tell Mr. Dalton to get some men out here."

The boys looked at each other in dismay. Another accident for one of Mr. Dalton's men! More trouble in Moaning Valley!

Pete had come to The Crooked-Y to spend a two-week vacation with Mr. and Mrs. Dalton, the new owners of the ranch. Jess Dalton, a famous rodeo rider who had worked with Mr. Crenshaw in several Western films, had decided to retire and buy a ranch with his life savings. The Daltons had barely started rebuilding the run-down ranch when the trouble began.

Moaning Valley, which had its name from ancient Indian legend

events of old Spanish days, had begun to moan again—after fifty years of silence. As if this was not enough to scare the hired ranch hands, the accidents had started.

The first accident occurred while two of the ranch hands were riding through Moaning Valley at dusk one evening. They suddenly heard a strange moaning noise, and their horses bolted, throwing both men. One of the men broke his arm, and both returned to the ranch talking about how there was "something spooky in that valley". Soon after, a herd of cattle stampeded for no apparent reason in the middle of the night. Then a ranch hand walking in the valley at dusk swore he had seen a giant shape emerge from El Diablo's Cave at the base of Devil Mountain. Shortly after that, two hands disappeared without any explanation and, though the sheriff insisted that he had found them in nearby Santa Carla, many of the ranch hands had refused to believe him.

Pete hadn't been at the ranch very long before he realised that the Daltons were extremely worried. Searches of the cave had revealed no explanation, and the sheriff could not pursue ghosts or legends. Both he and Mr. Dalton were sure there was some simple explanation, but so far no one had been able to find it. So Pete had hurriedly sent for Bob and Jupiter, explaining that there was a possible mystery for the Three Investigators to solve. The two boys had no trouble getting permission to come to the ranch, and the Daltons were glad to have them.

The Crooked-Y was located only ten miles from the modern holiday resort of Santa Carla, and less than a hundred miles north of Rocky Beach on the California coast. The countryside consisted of rugged mountains, deep valleys and canyons, with isolated coves along the Pacific coast. Bob's parents and

Jupiter's aunt and uncle had thought it a fine idea for the boys to have a chance to see a real ranch and riding, swimming and fishing.

But the boys were not riding or fishing or swimming; they were investigating the mystery of Moaning Valley. And that was how they had discovered the man who lay there on the ground, his leg caught beneath the pile of fallen rocks.

"It's this jinxed valley, that's what it is," the man muttered in pain. "I never should have come here. . . That moaning, that's what did it."

"No, I don't think so," Jupiter said seriously. "I think the shock of the naval firing loosened some stones and the slide resulted. The side of Devil Mountain is very dry and quite steep."

"It was that moaning!" the injured man insisted.

"We'd better get some help, fellows," Pete said. "We can't get those rocks off him alone."

Just then a horse whinnied close by. The boys turned to see three men riding over the top of the valley towards them. One of the men led a riderless horse. The leading rider was Mr. Dalton himself.

"What are you boys doing here?" Mr. Dalton demanded as he dismounted. He was a tall, wiry man in a bright red shirt, faded blue jeans, and tooled high-heeled western boots. His tanned, leathery face was lined with worry.

The boys explained how they had found the injured man.

"How do you feel, Cardigo?" Mr. Dalton asked as he knelt down beside the ranch hand.

"I've got a broken leg," mumbled the man, "and it's this jinxed valley that did it. I'm getting out."

"I think the firing of the guns loosened some rocks and started the slide," Jupiter explained.

"Of course," Mr. Dalton agreed. "That was it. Hold

still now, Cardigo, and we'll have you loose in a jiffy."

Moments later they had removed the rocks from the injured man, and the two ranch hands had gone for the truck. They backed up to the rock-fall and carefully lifted Cardigo into the back. The truck drove off for the hospital in Santa Carla, and the three boys returned to their bikes.

It was completely dark by the time Bob, Pete and Jupiter rode up to the ranch house and parked their bikes. Altogether there were five ranch buildings: a bunkhouse for the hands, a large barn, a smaller barn, a cookhouse, and the main house. The main house was an old, two-storey, wood-beam and adobe structure surrounded by a deep, cool porch. The whole house was covered with the bright red flowers of trumpet vine, and the deep red blooms of bougainvillaea. Fenced corrals surrounded the entire group of buildings.

Men were gathered in small grounds around the cookhouse, obviously talking about the accident. Their voices were low, but their faces showed fear and anger.

The boys were about to go into the main house when a voice came out of the night—a deep, harsh voice.

"What have you boys been up to?"

On the porch something moved and the boys made out the small, wiry form and sharp, weather-lined face of Luke Hardin, the ranch foreman.

"Big place, this ranch," Hardin said. "Get lost mighty easy."

"We're used to open country and mountains, Mr. Hardin," Jupiter replied. "You don't have to worry about us."

The foreman took a step towards them. "I heard

what you've been up to. Moanin' Valley, that's where it is. That place ain't fit for youngsters, hear? You stay away from there!"

Before the boys could protest, the door of the ranch house opened and a small, peppery woman with grey hair and a deeply tanned face bustled out.

"Nonsense, Luke!" Mrs. Dalton snapped. "Those boys aren't children. They seem to have a heap more sense than you do."

"Moanin' Valley ain't a good place," Hardin said stubbornly.

"A grown man like you," Mrs. Dalton exclaimed, "Afraid of a cave!"

"I ain't afraid," Hardin said slowly. "But I ain't afraid to face facts, neither. I lived around here all my life. Even when I was a boy I heard about Moanin' Valley. I never believed the stories then, but now I ain't so sure."

"Fiddlesticks! It's just old superstition and you know it!" Mrs. Dalton said. Though she spoke bravely, Mrs. Dalton couldn't quite hide the fact that she, too, was worried.

"What do you think causes the moaning, Mr. Hardin?" Jupiter asked the foreman.

The foreman squinted gravely at Jupiter. "Don't know, boy. No one else does, either. We've looked but no one's found anything. Nothin' we could see that is."

The foreman's eyes seemed to glow in the darkness. "Indians always did say that no one could see The Old One!"

El Diablo's Escape

"LUKE!" Mrs. Dalton cried.

But the foreman stood his ground. "I ain't saying I believe the stories. But a man's got to look straight at things. That cave's started moanin' again, but so far nobody's found nothin' to explain it. If it ain't The Old One, what do you reckon it is?"

With that, Luke Hardin walked down off the porch towards the bunkhouse. Mrs. Dalton stared after him with a worried expression.

"I'm afraid this is affecting all of us," Mrs. Dalton said. "Luke's as brave a man as I ever saw. I never heard him talk that way before."

"I wonder why he decided to talk to us about The Old One?" Jupiter asked thoughtfully.

Mrs. Dalton suddenly smiled. "I expect Luke's just tired. We've all been worried and working too hard. Now, what do you boys say to some milk and cookies?"

"Yes, ma'am!" Pete answered quickly for all of them.

Soon the boys were eating cookies in the comfortable living-room of the old ranch house. Colourful Indian rugs covered the floor under the rustic hand-hewn furniture, and a large stone fireplace almost filled one wall. The mounted heads of deer, bear, and mountain lions hung on the walls.

"Just what *is* The Old One, Mrs. Dalton?" Jupiter asked, helping himself to another cookie.

"An old Indian legend, Jupiter, nothing more. When the Spaniards first came here a very long time ago the local Indians said that a black and shiny

monster called The Old One lived in a pool deep inside the cave in Devil Mountain."

Pete blinked. "But if no one could see The Old One, how did they know it was black and shiny?"

Mrs. Dalton laughed. "There, you see? Of course it doesn't make sense. I suppose they believed that someone had once seen the thing and told others about it, and that's how the story was handed down."

"What did the Spaniards think?" Bob asked.

"Well, that was a long time ago," Mrs. Dalton said, "and they were pretty superstitious, too. They said they didn't believe it but they never went near the valley if they could help it. Only the very bravest, like El Diablo himself, went into the cave."

"Can you tell us about El Diablo?" Jupiter asked.

At that moment Mr. Dalton entered the room, accompanied by a small, thin man who wore heavy glasses. The boys had met the man earlier. He was a house guest of the Daltons, Professor Walsh.

"Ah, boys, I hear that you have been out at our mysterious Moaning Valley," said the professor.

"Foolishness!" Mr. Dalton snapped. "Nothing has happened there that doesn't happen on any ranch. Simple accidents, nothing more."

"Of course you're right," Professor Walsh said, "but I'm afraid your men don't believe that. Uneducated people would rather believe in supernatural forces than in their own carelessness."

"If only we could find the cause and show them," Mr. Dalton said. "After this accident to-night I'll lose more men. But even Jupiter here could see that the slide was caused by that naval gunfire off the coast."

"Excuse me, sir," Jupiter interrupted. "but we would like to help if we could. We've experience in this sort of thing, as Mr. have told you."

"Experience?" Mr. Dalton repeated, staring at the boys.

Jupiter produced two cards from his pocket and handed them to Mr. Dalton. The tall rancher studied them. The first, a large business card, said:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

"We Investigate Anything"

? ? ?

First Investigator - JUPITER JONES

Second Investigator - PETER CRENSHAW

Records and Research - BOB ANDREWS

Mr. Dalton frowned. "Investigators, eh? Well, I don't know, boys. The sheriff might not like boys interfering."

Professor Walsh looked at the card. "Why the question marks, boys? Do you doubt your ability as detectives?"

The professor smiled at his own joke, but Bob and Pete only grinned and waited for Jupe to explain. Adults always asked about the question marks, which was exactly what Jupiter wanted.

"No, sir," Jupiter said. "The question marks are our symbol. They stand for questions unanswered, mysteries unsolved, enigmas of all sorts that we attempt to unravel. So far we have never failed to explain any riddle we've found."

Jupiter said the last proudly. But Mr. Dalton was looking at the second card, a small green one. Each of the boys had one, and they all read the same:

This certifies that the bearer is a Volunteer Junior Assistant Deputy co-operating with the Police Force of Rocky Beach. Any assistance given him will be appreciated.

*Samuel Reynolds
Chief of Police*

Professor Walsh peered at the card through his thick glasses. "Well, well. Very impressive, boys. You do indeed have fine credentials."

"You boys certainly showed more sense to-night than half the adults around here," Mr. Dalton said at last. "Maybe three boys with a fresh viewpoint are just what we need to solve this nonsense. I'm sure there's a simple explanation, and if you promise to be very careful around that cave, I say go ahead and investigate."

"We'll be careful!" the boys cried in unison.

Mrs. Dalton smiled. "I'm sure there's some very simple explanation we've all missed."

Mr. Dalton snorted. "I say it's the wind blowing through those old tunnels and nothing more."

Jupiter finished the last cookie. "You and the sheriff have searched the cave, sir?"

"From one end to the other. Many of the passages are blocked by debris from old earthquakes, but we searched every one we could find."

"Did you find anything that looked as if it had changed recently?" Jupiter questioned.

"Changed?" Mr. Dalton frowned. "Nothing we could see. What are you getting at, son?"

"Well, sir," Jupiter explained. "I understand that the moaning only began a month ago. Before that it hadn't been heard for at least fifty years. If the wind is causing the sound, then it seems only logical that something must have changed inside the cave."

the moaning sound start again. I mean, I doubt if the wind has changed."

"Hah!" Professor Walsh said. "There's clear logic Dalton. Perhaps these boys *can* solve your mystery."

Jupiter ignored the interruption. "I also understand," he went on, "that the moaning occurs only at night, which would not be the case if the wind alone were responsible. Have you noticed if it happens every windy night, by any chance?"

"No, I don't think it does, Jupiter," Mr. Dalton was beginning to look really interested. "I see what you mean. If it were just the wind, then we should hear moaning *every* windy night. . . . Of course, it could be a combination of wind and some special atmospheric condition."

Professor Walsh smiled. "Or it could be El Diablo come back to ride again!"

Pete gulped. "Don't say that, Professor. Jupiter already said the same thing!"

Professor Walsh looked over at Jupiter. "He did did he? You're not going to tell me that *you* believe in ghosts, are you, young man?"

"No one knows about ghosts for sure, sir," Bob put in seriously. "However, we've never actually found a real ghost."

"I see," the professor said. "Well, the Spanish people have always insisted that El Diablo will come back when he is needed. I've done a great deal of research, and I can't really say that he couldn't come back."

"Research?" Bob asked.

"Professor Walsh is a professor of history," Mrs. Dalton explained. "He's here in Santa Carla for a year to do special research on California history. Mr. Dalton thought he might be able to help us explain Moaning Valley to our ranch hands."

"With no luck so far," the professor admitted. "But perhaps you boys would be interested in the full story of El Diablo? I'm thinking of writing a book on his colourful career."

"That would be great!" Bob exclaimed.

"Yes, I would like to hear more about him," Jupiter agreed.

Professor Walsh leaned back in his chair and began to tell the story of El Diablo and his famous last adventure.

In the early days of California the land that now made up The Crooked-Y ranch had been part of the Delgado Rancho. The estate of the Delgado family had been one of the largest grants of land given to the Spanish settlers by the King of Spain. The Spaniards did not come to California in large numbers, as the English did in the eastern part of America. So the Delgado Rancho remained a vast private domain for many generations.

Then settlers began to come to California from the East, and slowly the land of the Delgados was given away, lost, or stolen. After the Mexican War, California became part of the United States, and more and more Americans arrived to settle the land, especially after the great Gold Rush of 1849. By 1880 almost all the great domain of the Delgados was gone, except a small area about the size of The Crooked-Y that included Moaning Valley.

The last of the Delgados, Gaspar Ort ga Jesus de Delgado y Cabrillo, was a brave and fiery young man who grew up hating the American settlers. He thought of them as thieves who had stolen his family's land. Young Gaspar had little money and no power, but he longed to avenge his family and regain his land. He decided to become the champion Spanish-Mexican families who had be

for so long. Hiding out in the hills, he became an outlaw. To the Spanish people he was a new Robin Hood. To the Americans he was nothing more than a bandit.

The Americans named Gaspar Delgado *El Diablo*—The Devil—after the mountain where he had his cave headquarters. But for two years they could not catch him. He stole tax money, scared away tax collectors, raided American government offices and stole their funds, and generally helped the Spanish-speaking Californians and terrorized the Americans.

But in 1888 *El Diablo* was finally captured by the sheriff of Santa Carla County. In a famous trial, which the Spanish-speaking people said was a fake, he was sentenced to hang. Then, two days before he was to be executed, some friends helped him in a daring daylight escape. *El Diablo* climbed over the roof of the courthouse, jumped several feet to another roof, and finally leaped on to the back of his waiting black horse.

Wounded in his escape, and closely pursued by the sheriff and his posse, *El Diablo* rode to his hide-out in the cave in Moaning Valley. The sheriff and his men blocked all known exits, but they did not go inside. They thought that *El Diablo* would have to come out when he became hungry, or when his wound became too painful to endure.

Though they stood watch for several days, there was no sign of *El Diablo*. But all the time they waited, they heard a strange moaning coming from somewhere inside the cave. Naturally they assumed that the moans came from the wounded bandit. Finally the sheriff ordered his men inside. They searched every passage and cavern for four days, but found nothing. They searched the whole countryside, too. But they never uncovered a trace of *El Diablo*—not

him, or his body, or his clothes, or his pistol, or his horse, or his money. Nothing.

El Diablo was never seen again. Some said that his faithful sweetheart, Dolores de Castillo, had gone into the cave through a secret entrance and helped him escape, and that they had fled far away to a new life in South America. Others said that friends spirited him out and then hid him in *ranchos* after *ranchos* for many years.

But most people said that El Diablo never left the cave, that he simply remained hidden where the Americans could not find him, and that he was still there! For many years, every time there was an unsolved robbery or act of violence, it was said to have been El Diablo, still riding through the night on his great black horse. The moaning continued somewhere inside the cave, which became known as El Diablo's Cave.

"Then," Professor Walsh concluded, "the moaning suddenly stopped. The Spanish-speaking people said that El Diablo had grown weary and given up his raids—but that he was still in the cave waiting for a time when he would be really needed!"

"Gosh," Pete exclaimed. "You mean some people think he's still there in the cave?"

"How could he be?" Bob asked.

"Well, boys," the professor said, "I've done a great deal of research on El Diablo. For example, all his old pictures show him wearing his pistol on the right hip, but I am certain he was left-handed!"

Jupiter nodded thoughtfully. "The stories about such a legendary figure are often false."

"Exactly," Professor Walsh said. "Now the official story has always been that he died of his wound that night in the cave. But I have studied the record closely, and I am convinced that I

not have been fatal. Since he was only eighteen years old in 1888, it is entirely possible that El Diablo is still alive!"

4

The Investigation Begins

"Don't be ridiculous, Walsh!" Mr. Dalton exploded. "Why, that would make him almost a hundred years old. A man that old isn't likely to be running around the countryside!"

"I think you'd be surprised how spry a man of a hundred can be," Professor Walsh said quietly. "There are reports of men in the Caucasus Mountains of southern Russia who still ride and fight when they are a hundred or more. Anyway, our phantom isn't doing much more than moan from a cave."

"That's true, sir," Jupiter said.

"Also," Professor Walsh pointed out, "it is entirely possible that El Diablo might have descendants. Perhaps a son or even a grandson is carrying on his career."

Mr. Dalton began to look a little less sceptical. "That sounds more likely. The people who had the ranch before us never used Moaning Valley, but we are planning to build a range corral out there. Perhaps some descendant doesn't want El Diablo's legend interfered with."

"Jess, that could be the answer!" Mrs. Dalton cried. "Don't you remember? Some of our older Mexican ranch hands were against our plan to use Moaning Valley even before the moaning began."

"And they were among the first to leave us," Mr. Dalton exclaimed. "To-morrow I'm going to talk to

the sheriff and see if he knows of any descendants of El Diablo."

"Perhaps you'd all like to see a picture of El Diablo," Professor Walsh said. He took a small picture from his pocket and passed it around. It showed a slim young man with burning, dark eyes and a proud face. The picture, which was obviously a photograph of a painting, seemed to prove that El Diablo had been little more than a boy. He wore a wide-brimmed, high-crowned black *vaquero* sombrero, a short black jacket, a black shirt with a high neck, and tight black trousers that flared at the bottom above shiny black pointed boots.

"Did he always wear black?" Bob asked.

"Always," Walsh replied. "He said that he was in mourning for his people and his country."

"He was a bandit and nothing more, and tomorrow I'll talk to the sheriff to see if any fools are trying to continue his legend," Mr. Dalton said firmly. Then the lean rancher smiled. "And interesting as I admire El Diablo is, a ranch doesn't run itself. I have work to do to-night, and you boys must be tired from your trip. I expect I'll be working you hard to-morrow. Pete's Dad said you wanted to learn all about how a ranch operates, and the only way to learn is to do the work."

"We're really not at all tired, Mr. Dalton," Jupiter said briskly. "Are we, fellows?"

"Not at all," Bob agreed.

"Gosh, no," Pete echoed.

"It's still early and a clear night," Jupe went on. "and we'd like to look around the ranch as much as we can. The beach is especially interesting at night. There's some remarkable flora and fauna up here along the sea-shore that only appears at night."

Mr. and Mrs. Dalton looked impressed. Juniter's

correct use of so many big words always made adults think that he must be older than he actually was. Bob and Pete, however, were aware that Jupe had more on his mind than a walk along the beach. They tried to look as wideawake as possible.

"Well . . ." Mrs. Dalton began dubiously.

"Why not, boys?" Mr. Dalton decided. "It's early, and I expect the first night on a ranch is too exciting to be wasted in sleep." He turned to his wife. "Do them good, Martha. Better to look around the beach to-night, because I'll be keeping them pretty busy starting tomorrow."

"All right then," Mrs. Dalton smiled. "Off with you, but no later than ten o'clock. We get up early here."

The three boys did not wait for further talk. They carried their cookie plates and milk glasses to the kitchen and went out the back door.

As soon as they were out of the house, Jupiter started to give instructions. "Pete, you go to the barn and get that long coil of rope I saw hanging there. Bob, you go up to your room and get our chalk and our flashlights. I'll get our bikes ready."

"Are we going to the cave, Jupe?" Bob asked.

"Right. That is the only place to solve the mystery of Moaning Valley."

"The cave?" Pete gulped. "Now? Couldn't we see more in the day-time?"

"The moaning only happens at night," Jupiter pointed out, "and when you're inside a cave day-time doesn't make any difference. Besides, the cave doesn't moan every night. We know that it's been moaning to-night, and if we don't go now we might have to wait for days."

By this time the other two were convinced. They

moved swiftly into operation, and shortly afterwards the three boys met at the ranch gate.

Pete tied the long coil of rope to his luggage carrier, and they bicycled away along the narrow dirt road. The night was warm and the moon was up now, shining down on the silvery road that lay ahead.

Although the Crooked-Y Ranch stretched for miles along the shore of the Pacific Ocean, the sea itself was hidden by the coastal mountains. In the moonlight the rocky mountains were tall and silent, and the green live-oak trees looked like pale white ghosts. As they rode, the boys could hear the herds of cattle moving restlessly in the fields, the horses snorting and whinnying close to the road.

Then suddenly, without warning, the eerie moan floated out across the valley.

"Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhh — oooooooooooooooooooooo — oooooooooo—oo!"

Even though they had expected it, Pete and Bob both jumped nervously.

"Good," whispered Jupiter. "The moaning hasn't stopped."

They quietly parked their bikes and from the high ridge looked across the moonlit valley at the dark opening of El Diablo's Cave.

"Gosh, Jupe," Bob said. "I keep thinking I see things moving."

"And I hear noises," Pete added.

"Yes," Jupiter said firmly. "But that is your imagination. In eerie surroundings like these, the simplest sound seems frightening. Now are we all ready? Bob, check the flashlights again."

Bob tested the flashlights and Pete looped the rope over his shoulder. Each boy took his piece of chalk in his hand.

"Caves can be dangerous unless you take the

El Diablo's Cave

PETE threw himself at Jupiter, knocking the First Investigator away from the mouth of the cave. The boulder struck the ground with shattering force directly where Jupiter had been standing.

Bob scrambled to his feet. "Are you all right?" he asked anxiously.

Pete stood up. "I think so. Are you, Jupe?"

Jupiter got up more slowly and brushed at his clothes. His eyes had that faraway look that they always got when he was thinking.

"I was unable to move. A most interesting mental reaction," he mused. "It's similar to the way a small animal becomes paralysed when a snake looks at it. The animal literally can't move, and is easily caught when it could have escaped."

Bob and Pete both stared at their friend as he coolly analysed such a narrow escape from injury. Jupiter gazed up at the side of Devil Mountain in the moonlight.

"There seem to be many loose boulders up there," Jupe observed, "and the mountain-side is very dry. I imagine it's quite common for rocks to fall here. The naval gunnery probably loosened them in many places."

The three boys approached the big rock. It was buried deep in the ground only a few yards from the entrance to El Diablo's cave.

"Look, there are marks on it!" Bob was pointing at the boulder. "Gosh, Jupe, do you think someone pushed it down on us?"

"There *are* some marks," Jupiter said after he had examined the rock more carefully. "Of course that is not so surprising."

"It hit against a lot of other rocks on its way down," Pete pointed out.

"We didn't see anyone up there," Bob said.

Jupiter nodded. "Still, someone up there might not want to be seen."

"Gee, maybe we better go back," Pete said.

"No, but we'll be even more careful," Jupiter said. "At least rocks can't fall down a mountain at us when we're inside the cave."

With Jupiter in the lead, the boys entered the cave. They turned on their flashlights, and Bob marked the first question mark and arrow at the entrance.

Even with their flashlights on, they could see nothing but a long, dark passage that went straight into Devil Mountain. Its walls were smooth, and the ceiling was just high enough to permit Pete—the tallest investigator—to stand up. For a distance of about forty feet the passageway continued to be a straight tunnel with smooth stone walls. Then it suddenly opened into a large cavern.

The boys shone their flashlights all around the cavern. They were in a huge room with a towering ceiling. The far end of the cavern was so distant they could only just see it.

"It's like a big city railroad station!" Bob exclaimed. "I never saw so big a cave." His voice sounded hollow and faraway.

"Hello!" Pete called.

"*Hello . . . hello . . . hello-ooooooooo,*" his voice echoed.

The boys laughed. The echoes seemed to bounce through the cavern. "*Hello . . . hello-ooooo!*" shouted Bob.

While Pete and Bob were shouting, Jupiter was inspecting the huge cavern more closely with the help of his flashlight.

"Look!" he suddenly called to them.

To their left, in the wall, was a small black hole—the opening of a passage that seemed to lead out of the cavern. The boys aimed their flashlights at the walls on both sides of the cavern. They saw many more openings—at least ten passages that led from the big cavern deeper into the mountain.

"Jeepers," Pete said, "which way do we go?"

All the passages looked about the same—barely high enough for Pete to stand up in, and about four feet wide.

Jupiter frowned. "It is obvious that El Diablo's Cave must be a large complex of passages and chambers all through the mountain."

"Maybe that's why the posse couldn't find El Diablo," Bob said. "There were so many passages that he could stay hidden."

Jupiter nodded. "That seems a likely explanation."

"How does a cave like this get started anyway?" Pete asked, looking around with awe.

"Water erosion mostly," Bob explained. "I've read about it in the library. A mountain like this is made up of different rocks, some softer than the others. The water comes in and wears away the softer rock. It takes millions of years sometimes. A lot of this area was under water a long time ago."

"Bob's right," Jupiter said. "But I'm not sure that all of these passages are natural. Some of them look man-made. Maybe by El Diablo's men."

"Or miners, Jupe," Bob said. "I read how they used to look for gold around here."

Pete was shining his light at first one passage, then another. "Where do we start looking?" he asked.

to the first side passage, and the boys entered the tunnel.

They moved cautiously, their flashlights probing ahead until, less than thirty feet from the entrance, the tunnel suddenly ended. It did not end in a blank wall but in a pile of fallen rock that completely blocked the passage.

"Mr. Dalton said many of the tunnels were blocked by old earthquakes," Bob recalled.

Pete looked worried. "Do you think it's still dangerous?"

"No," Jupiter said. "The ceilings are very solid. It took a heavy shock to make these rocks fall, and then only the very weakest places fell. This is a very safe cave."

They retraced their steps, and tried the next four tunnels, carefully marking each entrance. All four passages ended in piles of fallen rocks.

"We're wasting time," said Jupiter finally. "We'll split up and each search a passage. They seem quite safe."

"We'll each go through our tunnel until we can see the end," Bob agreed, "unless it turns out not to be blocked."

"That's it," Jupiter said. "If one of us finds a clear passage he can come back and wait here for the others."

Quickly, each of the boys plunged into a tunnel, hopefully shining his flashlight ahead.

Jupiter found that his passage was natural for only a short distance. Then his flashlight revealed beams and braces that held up the walls, as in a mine shaft. He moved ahead cautiously for a few more yards, studying the floor and walls of the shaft.

Abruptly he came to a wall of rock and dirt that blocked the passage. Kneeling down to inspect the

barricade more closely, he discovered a small, hard black stone that puzzled him. It was quite different from any stone he had ever seen. He stuck it into his pocket to examine later.

Just then a yell echoed through the passage.

"Jupe! Bob! Hurry!"

At that moment Bob was in another cavern similar to the first they had found. The tunnel he had been exploring had led him straight into another cavern. He was standing there dismayed because this one, too, had many small passages that led out of it. He had just decided to return to the first cavern and wait for the others when he heard Pete's yell. Immediately he rushed back to the entrance of his tunnel.

Meanwhile, Jupiter was racing towards the mouth of Pete's tunnel. Suddenly something came hurtling at him out of the dark. The next thing he knew he was sprawling on the stone floor with some wild creature clawing at him.

"Help!" a voice called in fright.

The voice was almost in Jupiter's ear. It was Bob's voice.

"Bob, it's me!" cried Jupiter.

The hands that were clawing at Jupe relaxed, and the two boys shone their lights on each other.

"Gosh, I thought something had grabbed me," Bob said.

"My reaction was the same," Jupiter said. "It was a case of panic brought on by Pete's call for——"

"Pete!" Bob cried.

"Come on!" said Jupe.

The two boys raced into the passage Pete had taken. The tunnel seemed longer than the others. They had been running for some distance before they saw a light ahead. It was coming from Pete's flashlight.

"Here I am!" Pete called.

Bob and Jupiter burst out of the passage into still another large cavern. Pete stood in the centre, the beam of his flashlight trained on the left wall. He was looking pale.

"There was . . . something in here!" Pete stammered. "I saw it. All black and shiny!"

Bob and Jupiter focused their flashlights on the wall. They could see nothing at all.

"I tell you I saw something," Pete insisted. "When I came out of the tunnel I heard a noise. I shone my light and saw . . . this . . . thing! Over there near the wall. It was big. I was so surprised I dropped my light, and when I picked it up the thing was gone."

Bob looked sceptical. "Maybe you were just nervous, Pete. We shouldn't have split up."

But Jupiter walked over to the wall where Pete said he had seen the black, shiny shape. He knelt down.

"Pete wasn't just nervous, Bob," Jupiter said. "Look here."

Pete and Bob hurried to where Juve was kneeling. There were two large, dark marks on the stone floor. Big, egg-shaped footprints that reflected the bright beam of the flashlight.

"What . . ." Bob hesitated. "What is it, Juve?"

"Something wet," Jupiter said. "Water probably, but it might be something else."

"Ugh," Pete gulped.

Jupiter shone his light all across the floor. There were no other marks. The ceiling, too, was completely dry.

"There's nothing else wet around," he said. "Pete is right. Something was standing here. Something that left wet marks."



THE END OF THE WORLD

"Marks that big? They must be two or three feet long!" Bob said.

"At least," Jupiter said solemnly. "Big and wet and shiny. Sort of a——"

"Monster!" Pete finished the sentence for Jupiter.

"The Old One!" Bob exclaimed.

The three boys looked at each other nervously. They did not believe in unknown monsters, but what could have made such big, wet marks?

Then a powerful glare of light fixed the three boys like moths against the wall. A harsh voice called from behind the dazzling light.

"What's goin' on here?"

A figure came slowly towards them—a bent, twisted figure with a wild white beard, carrying an enormous-looking rifle.

6

A Dangerous Passage

THE old man pointed towards the dark tunnels that led from the cavern.

"Them passages goes a far piece inside," he said in a high, cracked voice. "You young-uns could get lost mighty easy in there."

The old man's red-rimmed eyes gleamed wickedly.

"Got to be mighty careful here," he croaked. "Got to know the country, yessir. Seventy years I lived out here, never lost my scalp. No sir. Got to think ahead, that's the story. Know the country and fight the enemy."

"Scalp?" Pete stared. "You fought Indians? Here?"

The old man waved his ancient rifle. "Injuns! I'll

tell you about Injuns, I will. Lived with Injuns all my life. Fine people but hard enemies, yessir. Almost lost my scalp twice. Ute country and Apache country. Sneaky, the Apaches. But I got away."

"I don't think there are any Indians now, sir," Jupiter said politely, "and we won't become lost."

The old man's eyes suddenly focused on the boys. For the first time he actually seemed to be seeing them. "Now?" he repeated. "Of course there're no Injuns now. Are you boys crazy? You must be, wandering around in the cave. Strangers around here, eh?" His voice was lower now, and steadier, and he had lost his wild look.

Bob was the first to reply. "Yes sir, we're from Rocky Beach."

"We're staying at The Crooked-Y with Mr. and Mrs. Dalton," Jupiter explained. "Mr. . . . ?"

"Ben Jackson. You boys can call me Ben," the old man said. "The Daltons, eh? Fine people, yes-siree. I was passing this old cave and thought I heard someone yell out. Guess that was one of you, eh?"

"Yes sir," Jupiter said, "but we weren't lost. You see, we mark our way so we always know how to get back."

"Blaze a trail, eh? Well now, that's mighty smart. I reckon maybe you would have been okay out in the big country in the old days. What are you doing in here, anyway?"

"We're trying to find out what makes the moaning sound," Bob explained.

"Only it stopped as soon as we came in," Pete added.

Suddenly the old man seemed to crouch. His eyes clouded again, and grew wary. The change was so startling that for a moment the boys could almost imagine they were looking at a different person.

"Moanin', eh?" Ben's voice was high-pitched again. "Folks say it's El Diablo come back. Not me, no sir. I say it's The Old One, that's what I say."

"The Old One lived in this here cave long before any white man showed up," he went on. "Time don't mean anything to The Old One. You boys stay out of here or The Old One'll get you sure. Jess Dalton, he better stay out, too. The sheriff, all of them. The Old One'll get them all!"

The old man's voice crackled in the dark shadows of the cavern. Bob and Pete looked nervously at Jupiter, who was watching old Ben intently.

"Have you ever seen him, Mr. Jackson?" Jupiter asked. "The Old One, I mean? Have you seen him here in the cave?"

"Seen him?" the old man cackled. "I seen something, yessir. More'n once I seen it."

The old man looked around warily, and then once again he changed. His twisted body straightened, his eyes cleared, his voice lowered and became calm.

"Well, you boys better come on out with me now. Can't leave you yelling in here, eh?"

Jupiter nodded. "I think we've seen enough for now anyway. You're quite right, it does seem easy to become lost in here."

The old man picked up his electric lantern. Its bright light made the shadows of the cave seem far less menacing.

They soon found their way out into the quiet valley. As the old man walked them to their bikes, Jupiter cocked his ear towards the cave to listen. But the moaning sound did not come again. They thanked Ben Jackson for coming in to find them and said good night.

"You're smart boys, yessir," the old man said. "Only The Old One's smarter than anyone. You boys

better be careful. You tell Jess Dalton, The Old One is watching, yessir."

The old man's cackling laughter followed the boys as they rode down the dirt road in the moonlight. Rounding a curve, Jupiter suddenly stopped his bike.

"Oooff!" Pete grunted, narrowly missing him.

Bob stepped on his brakes. "What's wrong, Jupe?" he asked.

"The Three Investigators do not give up until a job is completed," Jupiter said, his bike already turned round and headed back the way they had come.

"I think we should go back to the ranch," Bob said.

"So do I," Pete added quickly.

"Two to one, Jupe," Bob pointed out.

But Jupiter had already started pedalling back the way they had come. Bob and Pete watched for a moment, then began to follow him. They both knew there was no stopping Jupiter once he had an idea in his head.

When they caught up with The First Investigator, he was peering cautiously around the curve in the dark road.

"It's all clear," Jupiter said. "Come on."

"What are we doing, Jupe?" Bob asked as The First Investigator got off his bike.

"We're going to leave the bikes here and walk," Jupiter explained. "We'll try to keep out of sight." "Where do we walk to?" Pete wanted to know.

"I just noticed that this road curves around Devil's Head towards the sea," Jupiter explained. "I want to see if there is another entrance on the ocean shore."

Bob and Pete followed Jupiter down the dark road. The valley was shadowy in the moonlight. Shapes

in the moonlight. The boys climbed the fence and looked down over the steep cliff.

"We'll go to the right, towards the cave," Jupe said. "Pete had better lead and I'll come last. We'll rope ourselves together the way mountain climbers do. Then if we come to any difficult places, we'll cross them one at a time."

The boys quickly roped themselves together at their waists, and Pete led the way down the narrow path. Below, the sea surged in and out among giant black rocks made silvery by the moonlight. At low points on the path, spray flew up to drench the boys. Three times they had to turn and face the cliff to inch across narrow ledges.

At last the path led sharply downwards and they found themselves on a small white-sand beach. The beach was deserted now, but there was considerable evidence that people had been swimming there—empty beer cans, soft-drink bottles, and the remains of picnic lunches.

"We'll look all along the cliff for some form of opening," Jupiter decided.

The cliff face was heavily overgrown with scrubby bushes and stunted trees, and hidden in many places by large boulders. With their lights the boys searched behind the bushes and boulders. But they found no entrance to the cave.

"I think we're looking in the wrong place, Jupe," Pete said.

"Where else is there to look?" Bob asked.

"Well," Pete explained, "no one has told us about another entrance. If there is one, I'll bet it's hard to get to."

"You mean it's not here on the beach?" Bob asked. "But it has to be near here because that path is the only way down."

"I think you're right," Jupiter said. "Bob, you come with me. We'll search on the right side. Pete, you go left."

The rocks bordering the beach were slippery with seaweed and mussels so Jupiter and Bob had to pick their way cautiously. Jupiter kept his flashlight aimed at the cliff face in order to look for an opening.

Finally, they reached a point where they could go no farther unless they plunged into the water. Discouraged, they were turning back when they heard Pete shout.

"I found it!"

Bob and Jupiter scrambled over the wet rocks and ran pell-mell down the beach. At the far end, Pete was standing on a big flat rock. Between two giant boulders, they saw an opening in the cliff face. It was a small opening, and only a foot above the sea.

"I can hear the moaning again," Pete said. "Listen."

There was no mistaking the sound.

"Aaaaaahhhhhh — ooooooooooooo — oooooo — ooo!"

It floated out of the opening, very faint as if from deep inside the cavern.

Pete shone his flashlight into the entrance. It was black, wet and very narrow. It bore directly into the cliff face see.

7

Sounds in the Night

"It's awful narrow and dark, Jupe," Pete said uneasily.

"Maybe it doesn't go anywhere," Bob speculated.

"No," insisted Jupiter. "It must go into the cave or we wouldn't hear the moaning."

"It sure looks small," Pete said doubtfully.

Jupiter squatted and peered into the opening. "I think we can enter safely if we're careful. Bob, you're the smallest so we'll tie the rope to you and you'll go in first."

"Me? All alone? I thought we were all going to go in together."

"That would be the wrong way to do it, Bob," Jupiter explained. "When entering an unknown passage, the correct way is to send one person in, with a rope on him, while the other two remain outside ready to pull him out instantly if he encounters any danger."

"Sure," Pete added. "In those prison camp films, when the soldiers dug tunnels to escape, they always tied a rope to the man who was inside the tunnel. If he pulled once on the rope they hauled him out."

"Exactly," Jupiter said with a trace of annoyance. The First Investigator did not like to have anyone suggest that his ideas were not original. He turned to Bob. "Remember, pull hard on the rope if you get into any trouble. We'll pull you out."

Somewhat unconvinced but game, Bob tied the rope firmly around his waist. Cautiously he crawled into the narrow tunnel.

Inside it was dark and cold. The ceiling was much too low for him to stand up, and the walls were wet and slimy with green sea moss. He had to inch along on his hands and knees. As he crawled slowly forward, beaming his flashlight ahead, crabs scuttled away, their claws scraping on the damp rock.

After Bob had gone about thirty feet, the ceiling suddenly inclined sharply upward. He stood up. His flashlight beam showed that the tunnel still led

straight ahead, but it had become wide and dry, and angled upward.

"Jupe! Pete! It's okay," he called back into the tunnel.

Soon both Pete and Jupiter were standing beside him.

"It's all dry here," Pete observed.

"This part must be above the high-tide mark," Jupiter said. "I'll start marking our trail, and you and Bob listen for the moaning so we can go in the right direction."

They moved ahead, Jupiter stopping every ten feet or so to leave question marks in white chalk. After some forty feet they emerged into still another of the vast caverns that seemed to honeycomb the interior of Devil Mountain. Once more many dark passages led out of the large room.

The boys looked at each other in dismay.

"Well, here we go again," Pete said.

"This mountain is nothing but tunnels," Bob sounded discouraged. "How will we ever trace the sound?"

But Jupiter was not really looking at the new cavern or the many tunnel exits. He was listening.

"Have either of you heard the moaning since we came in?" Jupe asked.

Bob and Pete looked at each other.

"Gosh, no," Bob said.

"Not since we were outside!" Pete agreed.

"I didn't hear it all the time I was crawling," Bob added.

Jupiter nodded thoughtfully. "As soon as we enter, the moaning stops. A most suspicious circumstance. Not once, which could be an accident, but twice now."

Pete was puzzled. "You think maybe we do some-

thing when we come in? I mean, maybe we change something without knowing we change it?"

"That's one possibility," Jupiter acknowledged.

"Another explanation might be that someone saw us," said Bob. "But how could anyone have seen us on that beach in the dark?"

Jupiter shook his head. "I admit I'm at a loss to explain it myself. Perhaps it is just——"

They all heard the sound at the same moment. A faint and distant jingling of bells, and the *clip-clop clip-clop* of a horse's hoofs.

"A horse!" Bob exclaimed.

Jupiter turned his head and listened intently. The sound seemed to come from the wall of the cavern.

"It's . . . inside the mountain!" Jupiter said.

Bob protested. "It can't be, Juve. It has to be from another part of the cave."

Jupiter shook his head. "If my sense of direction is correct, the other part of the cave is to our left," he said. "We are facing the side of the mountain—and no tunnels go in that direction!"

"Maybe we better get out," Pete suggested.

"I think," Jupiter said hurriedly, "Pete is right. Let's go!"

The boys pushed pell-mell against each other in the scramble for the narrow exit. Pete reached the small tunnel first and began to crawl through. Jupiter and Bob followed right behind.

They tumbled out into water up to their knees and floundered across the flat rocks till they sprawled at last on the white sand of the beach. They lay there panting.

"Where *did* that noise come from?" Bob finally broke the silence.

"I don't know," Jupiter admitted reluctantly. "But

I think we've done enough exploring for one night. Let's start back."

Bob and Pete were only too glad to follow the First Investigator back up the narrow trail. They had nearly reached the iron gate at the top of the cliff when Jupiter suddenly stopped. In the darkness Pete almost ran into him.

"What are you doing, Jupe!"

Jupiter didn't reply. He was staring up at the twin peaks of Devil Mountain.

"What is it?" Bob asked in a whisper.

"I just had an idea," Jupiter answered slowly. "And I also thought I saw something move up there on the mountain where——"

The sound of jingling carried across the night along with the *clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop* of a horse's hoofs.

"Oh no!" Bob groaned.

"Is that what we heard inside the cave?" whispered Pete.

"I think so," Jupiter said. "The sound must have filtered down through some crevice in the rock of the mountain. Sound carries very clearly that way. It would have seemed as if it was inside the mountain itself."

The boys crouched down in the thick bushes near the gate as the hoofbeats came closer. Then a great black horse appeared on the steep slopes of Devil Mountain. It came down the mountain at a trot and passed within a few feet from where the boys crouched in the bushes.

"There's no rider

"Should we try to

"No, I don't think we should wait."

The boys crouc

bushes. Suddenly Pete stiffened, and pointed toward the slope. A man was coming down the mountain on a fast walk. As he passed their hiding place, they had a clear view of him in the moonlight. He was a tall, dark man with a long nose, a ragged scar on his right cheek, and a black patch over his right eye!

"Did you see that eye patch?" hissed Pete.

"And the scar," Bob added.

"I was more interested in his suit," Jupiter whispered. "It was definitely a business suit, and unless I am mistaken I think he had a pistol under his coat!"

"Can't we go now, Jupe?" said Pete nervously.

"Yes, I think we'd better," Jupiter agreed. "There has been a most interesting night."

Pete and Bob needed no urging. As they hurried along the road to where they had left their bikes, they kept looking behind them anxiously. But they saw nothing else. While they were riding past the end of Moaning Valley, however, a long wail echoed through the night.

"Aaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh — oooooooooooooooooooooo — oooooo — ooo!"

The boys began to pedal furiously in the direction of the ranch house.

8

El Diablo !

PETE woke up in bright sunlight. Confused, he looked around the unfamiliar room. Where was he? Then a horse whinnied somewhere outside, a cow lowed, and Pete remembered that he was in the upstairs bedroom of The Crooked-Y. He leaned over the edge of his bunk to see what Jupiter was up to. Jupiter was not there.

Pete sat up quickly, bumping his head on the low ceiling.

"Ouch!" he grunted.

"Shhhhhh!" Bob hissed from his bunk across the room, and pointed towards the window.

In front of the window Jupiter sat cross-legged on the floor, looking like a small Buddha in his bath robe. A large sheet of paper was spread out on the floor in front of him and in the middle of it he had stacked four books. On the paper Jupiter had drawn a lot of pencil lines.

As Pete stared down at the books and the paper and the pencil marks he realized that Jupiter had made a rough model of Moaning Valley. He had marked the cave entrances in pencil.

"He's been sitting like that for an hour," Bob explained.

"Gosh," Pete said. "I couldn't sit like that for ten minutes!" The intense concentration of their stocky friend always awed Bob and Pete.

Suddenly, Jupiter spoke. "I am ascertaining the exact topographical arrangement of Moaning Valley, Pete. The key to our puzzle lies in the physical pattern."

"Huh?" Pete said.

"Jupe means that he thinks the mystery can be solved by studying the lay of the land," Bob explained.

"Oh," Pete said. "Why didn't he say so?"

Ignoring Pete, Jupiter went on, "The real mystery of Moaning Valley is why does the moaning stop when we go inside? It happened twice last night, yet when we were leaving the area the moaning began."

He held up a newspaper. "I have here a newspaper report of the sudden recurrence of the moaning. In it

the sheriff says that the main reason no one has been able to identify the cause of the moaning is that once inside they never hear it any more."

Jupiter put down the paper. "I'm convinced now that the moaning doesn't stop by accident!"

"I guess you're right," Bob said. "The way it started again right when we were leaving sure looks like someone was watching us."

"But how does that—uh—model help us, Jupe?" Pete blurted out.

Jupiter looked down at his crude model. "I've marked all the places we were last night. Now we know that both times we entered the cave the moaning stopped instantly. It happened too quickly for it to have been someone *inside* the cave who was watching us."

Bob nodded eagerly. "I get it! So we had to be seen *before* we went in."

"Exactly," Jupiter said, "and from my model I've noticed that we could have been seen everywhere we went: from only one place—the top of Devil Mountain."

"Then all we have to do is tell Mr. Dalton someone is up on Devil Mountain and let him catch the thief!" exclaimed Pete.

Jupiter shook his head. "No, Pete, no one would catch us unless they caught the man and it would be almost impossible to get to the top without being seen."

"Whoever is up there would just run away."

"Then——" Bob began.

"How——" Pete started at the same instant.

"We will have to observe what is actually happening in the cave," Jupiter said solemnly, "so that we can tell people the full story."

"But we don't know what's happening in the cave," Pete objected. "Do we?"

"No, but I've got a plan in mind," revealed Jupiter, "and I've got a clue as to what it's all about!"

"You do?" Pete said. "What is it?"

"Last night I found this in one of the passages," Jupiter explained, holding up the rough, blackish stone he had found in the mine-shaft passage. "The passage was once a mine shaft, and I found this stone just where it ended in one of those blockages."

Bob took the little stone, looked at it with a puzzled expression and passed it on to Pete.

"But what is it, Jupe?" Pete demanded. "I mean, besides a kind of hard, slippery stone?"

"Scratch the window with it," Jupiter said.

"What?" Pete said, surprised. "You know it won't——"

"Go ahead," Jupiter urged, a smug expression on his round face.

Pete went to the window and scratched the small stone over the glass. It cut into glass almost as easily as a knife cutting into butter. Pete let out a low whistle.

"Jupe!" Bob exclaimed. "You mean that's a——"

"Diamond," Jupiter finished. "Yes, I think that's exactly what it is. A rough, uncut diamond. And a pretty big one. I think its quality isn't good, probably no more than an industrial stone. But it is a diamond."

"You mean El Diablo's Cave is a diamond mine? Here in California?" Bob asked sceptically.

"Well, there have been rumours, I think, and——"

That was as far as he got. A vigorous knock on the bedroom door interrupted him, and Mrs. Dalton's voice called, "Up and at 'em, boys! Breakfast's on the table. We'll have no late sleeping here!"

Everything else was forgotten for the moment as the boys realized how hungry they were. They dressed

and were in the big ranch kitchen five minutes later. Mr. Dalton and Professor Walsh smiled at them.

"Well, I see that Moaning Valley and its mysteries have not affected your appetites, boys," Professor Walsh commented.

Mrs. Dalton bustled around the roomy, bright kitchen and soon the boys were digging into stacks of buckwheat cakes and ham, and drinking mugs of cold fresh milk.

"You boys ready to do some work to-day?" Mr. Dalton asked.

"Of course they are," Mrs. Dalton said. "Why not take them up to the north meadow for the haying?"

"Good idea," Mr. Dalton agreed. "Later they can help round up some mavericks."

The boys, who had done some reading on ranch life, knew that "mavericks" were cattle that had strayed from the main herd into remote parts of the range.

"Did you boys have a good walk on the beach last night?" Professor Walsh asked. "What did you find?"

"We had an interesting expedition," Jupiter answered. "And we met a rather odd old man. He called himself Ben Jackson. Who is he, sir?"

"Old Ben and his partner, Waldo Turner, are prospectors," Mr. Dalton explained. "I imagine they've looked for gold and silver and precious stones all over the West in their day."

"According to local gossip they came here many years ago," Mrs. Dalton added, "when there was a rumour that gold had been found. Of course, there never was any gold, but apparently Old Ben and Waldo never gave up. They have a shack on our land, and still consider themselves prospectors. They don't seem to like to have visitors, but they don't mind get-

ting handouts from the ranchers around here. Of course, we call it a grubstake. They wouldn't take charity."

"They're quite famous local characters," Professor Walsh put in.

"They can really tell you stories," Mr. Dalton smiled. "Of course, they're somewhat eccentric, and most of their stories are just tall tales. For example, they'll tell you about fighting the Indians, but I doubt if they ever did."

"Gosh, you mean all that was a lie?" Pete exclaimed.

Before Mr. Dalton could reply, the back door of the kitchen burst open. The foreman, Luke Hardin, came in hurriedly.

"They just found young Castro out in Moanin' Valley," Hardin said grimly.

"Castro?" Mr. Dalton looked worried.

"Got thrown from his horse last night while he was riding herd on some strays. Lay there all night," said Hardin.

"Is he all right?" Mrs. Dalton asked.

"Doc says he's okay. They took him over to the hospital in Santa Carla."

"I'll go and see him right away!" Mr. Dalton jumped up.

"The men are kind of shook up," Hardin added, his face dark. "Two more told me they're going to quit. Castro was out in Moanin' Valley and says he saw something moving. He took a look. Whatever it was spooked his horse. He was thrown and the horse ran off. He's all bruised up and his ankle's sprained."

The Daltons looked at each other in despair. Jupiter spoke up.

"Was the horse a big black one, Mr. Hardin?" he asked.

"That's right—Big Ebony. A good horse. Came back to the corral on his own this morning, so we knew to look for young Castro."

Mr. Dalton spoke sharply. "Did you boys see Big Ebony last night?"

"Yes sir," Jupiter said. "A big black horse without a rider."

"You must always report a riderless horse on a ranch, boys," Mr. Dalton said severely. "We would have found Castro sooner."

"We would have, sir," Jupe explained, "but we saw a man following him and assumed that he was the rider. He was a tall man, with a scar on his right cheek and an eye patch."

Mr. Dalton shook his head. "Never heard of a man like that."

"Tall and an eye patch?" Professor Walsh inquired. His sounds menacing, but definitely not El Diablo. "No? He wasn't tall, and he didn't wear an eye patch."

Mr. Dalton started for the door. "Luke, get the men calmed down if you can. I'll join you in the north meadow after I see Castro. And I think I'll talk to the sheriff about that man the boys say they saw."

Jupiter spoke up again. "If you're going into town, perhaps you would take me? I have to return to Rocky Beach to-day."

"Why, Jupiter, you're not leaving us?" Mrs. Dalton asked.

"Oh, no," Jupiter assured her. "It's only that we need our scuba equipment. We saw some reefs offshore last night which look excellent for collecting specimens for our marine biology studies."

Bob and Pete stared at Jupe. They did not remember that they had seen any reefs, or that they were conducting marine biology studies. But they said nothing. They had learned not to question Jupiter when he had some scheme in mind.

"I'm afraid I don't have time to-day to take you down," Mr. Dalton said, "and I can't spare a man or a truck. You'd better wait a few days."

"That's quite all right, sir," Jupiter said. "If you'll take me into town I'll get the bus down. Someone will drive me back."

"Better hurry up and get ready, then," Mr. Dalton told him as he went out the door.

Mrs. Dalton looked at Bob and Pete. "I'm afraid you boys had better find something to do, too. With this trouble, Mr. Dalton won't have time to work with you to-day."

"We will, ma'am," Bob assured her.

The boys went back to their room while Jupiter gathered what he needed for his return to Rocky Beach. As he packed, he revealed what he had in mind for Bob and Pete while he was gone.

"I want you to go into Santa Carla and buy a dozen large, plain candles," Jupe said, "and three Mexican sombreros. With the Fiesta in Santa Carla there should be plenty of hats to buy. Tell Mr. and Mrs. Dalton you are going in to see the Fiesta parade."

"Three sombreros?" Pete repeated.

"Right," said Jupiter, without further explanation. "Then go to the library. Bob, I want you to learn all you can about the history of Devil Mountain and Moaning Valley. I mean all the exact details, not just legends."

"I'll find out all I can," Bob assured the First In-

vestigator. "What are you *really* going to Rocky Beach for?"

"To get the scuba equipment, as I said," Jupiter replied, "and to take the diamond into Los Angeles to have it examined by an expert."

Mr. Dalton called from below. "Jupiter! Ready?"

The boys hurried down, and Jupiter climbed into the cab of the pickup truck. As Bob and Pete watched him ride off, they realized that they still didn't know what Jupe was planning to do with the scuba equipment.

After helping Mrs. Dalton in the kitchen for an hour or so, Bob borrowed Mrs. Dalton's library card, and the two boys started off for Santa Carla on their bicycles.

"Enjoy the Fiesta, boys!" Mrs. Dalton called after them.

Actually, Bob and Pete were quite excited at the prospect of seeing the famous Santa Carla Fiesta, and they rode off in a holiday mood. The road from the beach wound through the vast inland valley, surrounded on three sides by the brown mountains of Southern California. Away from the sea the sun was hot, and the boys noticed that all the creeks they passed were dry. At one point they crossed the wide bed of the Santa Carla River itself. Down below the ridge, the river bed was completely dried up, with all plants growing on its sun-baked surface. Soon the highway began to climb towards San Mateo Pass. Bob and Pete had to get off their bikes and walk them around hairpin curves. Mountain valleys yawned close to the right, while rocky cliffs climbed steeply to the left. The boys walked slowly in the bright sun. After a long, hot hike they finally emerged at the top of the pass.

"Golly! Look at that!" Pete cried.



the boys stood transfixed as the horse bore down on them.

"Wow!" exclaimed Bob almost at the same moment.

Spread out before their eyes was a breathtaking panorama. The mountains sloped away to low foothills and then a wide coastal plain that spread in all directions to the blue water of the Pacific Ocean. The city of Santa Carla shimmered in the sun, its houses like tiny boxes in the great green expanse. Boats moved on the blue surface of the sea, and the mountainous Channel Islands seemed to float in the distance.

The boys were still staring at the magnificent sight when they heard thundering hoofbeats behind them. They whirled to see a horseman galloping down the highway straight at them. He rode a great black horse with a silver-mounted bridle and a silver-trimmed *charro* saddle, its enormous pommel horn glinting in the sun.

The boys stood transfixed as the horse bore down on them. The rider was a small slender man with dark eyes who wore a black sombrero, a short black jacket, flared trousers, and a black bandanna over the lower half of his face. He carried an ancient pistol that was aimed straight at the boys.

El Diablo!

A Sudden Attack

THE black horse reared high above the paralyzed boys, its hoofs pawing wildly at the air.

The rider waved his pistol and shouted, "Viva Fiesta!" Then he slipped off his black bandanna to reveal a boyish face full of mischief.

"Come to the Fiesta!" the young man shouted again, turned his horse in mid-air, and galloped off down the highway towards Santa Carla.

The boys stared after him.

"A Fiesta costume!" Pete groaned.

They looked at each other and laughed with relief. Scared by a boy in costume!

"I'll bet there are ten El Diablos in the Fiesta," Bob observed.

"Well, I hope we don't run into any of them in dark alleys," Pete said.

The boys climbed back on their bikes and began the long descent down the winding road through the pass. Soon they came out of the mountains into the outskirts of Santa Carla. They rode past houses, a golf course, and several outlying shopping centres of the bustling holiday resort.

When they reached the downtown section, they parked their bikes in a rack at the library and walked to Union Street, the main thoroughfare of Santa Carla. The street was blocked by police barriers in preparation for the Fiesta parade. People were already lined up behind the barriers, most of them dressed in the colourful costumes of old Spanish days. A holiday atmosphere filled the air.

Bob and Pete hurried to make their purchases at a little shop selling souvenirs. They bought a dozen thick white candles and three straw sombreros. Then they rushed out to the kerb just as the first band came marching past with a blare of trumpets and banging of drums.

After the band came the floats, decked with flowers and pretty girls and men in costumes. Most depicted important moments of California history. One showed Father Junipéro Serra, the Franciscan missionary who had established most of the fine old missions that

stretched up the long coast of California. Another represented the day John C. Fremont had raised the American flag over Santa Carla when the city had been taken from Mexico. Another showed El Diablo in his famous escape. At least five El Diablos rode around this float. One of them was the same grinning young rider on the black horse who had startled them at the top of the pass.

"Look at all the horses!" exclaimed Bob.

"I sure wish I could ride like that." Pete watched the horsemen with admiration.

Both boys were good riders, though not yet perfect, and they watched the horses with great interest. Ranchers in Spanish costumes, along with mounted police posses from up and down the state, went by, riding troops of golden palominos. Some of the horses performed intricate dance steps out in the
et.

There were carriages and covered wagons and old gecoaches, and then a float depicting Gold Rush
rs. Bob shook Pete's arm.

"Look!" he whispered, pointing towards two men
o were walking beside the Gold Rush float. They
l a burro loaded with food and shovels and pick-
s, and one of them was the bearded old man from
cave—Ben Jackson.

"The other one must be his partner, Waldo
mer," Bob said.

The two old-timers seemed to delight the crowd.
ey looked like real prospectors, even to the dust
l dirt on their mining clothes. Old Ben was
iously the leader, his white beard flowing as he
ped proudly along, leading the burro. Waldo
Turner, a taller and thinner old man with a white
moustache instead of a beard, followed behind.

The floats kept coming, the bands played on, and

the boys might have forgotten all about their mission at the library if Pete hadn't suddenly noticed the man.

"Bob!" he whispered urgently.

Bob looked up and there, a few feet away, was the tall, scar-faced man with the eye patch. The man didn't seem at all interested in the parade. As the boys watched, he hurried across Union Street and vanished.

"Come on," Bob said, and the boys quickly followed.

At the corner, they saw the tall man some twenty feet ahead and walking fast. From time to time he slowed down, as if watching something ahead.

"I think he's following someone," Bob observed.

"Can you see who it is?" asked Pete.

"No, you're taller," Bob said.

Pete stood as tall as he could, but he couldn't see who or what the man was following. Then he saw him turn off the pavement.

"He's going into a building," Pete reported.

"It's the library!" said Bob.

The man vanished through the tall double door and the boys hurried after him. Inside, they stopped. The library was almost deserted on this Fiesta day, yet the boys could see no trace of the tall man with the eye patch.

The main room was large, with many bookshelves and several exits into other rooms. Quickly the boys looked up and down the aisles between the shelves. Then they explored the exits. To their dismay they found the library had two doors leading to a back street. And the tall man was nowhere in sight.

"He's gone," Pete said, crestfallen.

"We should have split up and one of us gone around to the back. Jupiter would have remembered

that most libraries have more than one entrance," Bob said dejectedly. He was unhappy with himself for not thinking of such an obvious point.

"Well," Pete said. "He's gone and we might as well get on with that research Jupe wanted."

Bob agreed, and the two boys inquired about where they would find books on local history. A kindly librarian directed them to a small room that contained a special California history collection. Just as they were walking up to the desk in the smaller room, a heavy hand fell on Pete's shoulder.

"Well, well, our young investigators!"

Professor Walsh stood behind them, his eyes twinkling behind his thick glasses.

"Doing some research, boys?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Pete. "We want to find out all about Moaning Valley."

"Good, good," Professor Walsh said encouragingly. "That's just what I'm doing myself. I haven't had a great deal of luck, though. There doesn't seem to be much except unreliable legends. . . . Have you been to the Fiesta?"

"Yes, sir," Pete replied enthusiastically. "Boy, they sure have some great horses."

"It's a fine celebration," the professor agreed. "I think I'll go take a look since I'm not having much luck here. How are you boys going to get back to the ranch?"

"We have our bikes, sir," Bob said.

"Well, then, I'll see you later." Professor Walsh turned to leave.

Bob hesitated, then asked, "Did you happen to see a tall man with an eye patch while you were in the library?"

Walsh shook his head. "No, boys, I didn't. You mean that same man you saw last night?"

"Yes, sir," Pete said.

"Right here in town, eh?" Professor Walsh looked thoughtful. "No, I haven't seen him."

After the professor had gone, Bob and Pete went to work. They found three or four books that mentioned Moaning Valley, but none of them added anything to what they already knew. Then Bob discovered a small book, with yellowing, wrinkled pages, which was a complete history of Moaning Valley up to the year 1941. It was on the wrong shelf, which was probably the reason Professor Walsh hadn't seen it.

They borrowed the book with Mrs. Dalton's library card. Outside, the afternoon was still hot and sunny and the parade was just ending. People were streaming away from the main part of the town, many of them still in costume. The boys tied their packages on the luggage racks of their bikes and started home. Soon they began the long climb up San Mateo Pass. They rode as far up as they could with ease then dismounted and continued on foot.

Stopping to rest a moment, they looked out over the water towards the Channel Islands, hazy in the distance.

"Gosh, I'd like to get out to those islands," Pete said.

"They actually herd cattle on some of them," Bob said. "Cowboys and all, right out in the ocean."

Near the islands they could see the slim grey hull of Navy vessels on manoeuvres.

A car was coming up the highway from the direction of Santa Carla, but the boys were busy gazing out at the ocean. They paid no attention to the car until they suddenly realized, from the rasp of the motor, that it was travelling at top speed.

Whirling around, they discovered that it was partly off the road and heading straight for them.

"Look out, Bob!" Pete shouted.

Both boys leaped out of the path of the onrushing car just in time. It roared past them, veered back on to the road and raced away.

But their desperate leaps had carried them over the edge of the road. Slipping, unable to hold on, they plunged towards the deep chasm far below.

10

Jupiter Reveals a Plan

PETE slid down the steep incline over sharp rocks and brush that tore at his clothes. He clawed at the bushes to slow his fall, for the slope ended in an almost sheer drop ahead. But the vegetation was not strong enough to hold him. He was only some four feet from empty space when he crashed into the heavy trunk of a twisted tree.

"Oof!" Pete grunted, as his fingers instinctively closed around the thick trunk.

For a moment he lay still, clinging to the tree-trunk and breathing heavily. Then he realized that he was alone.

"Bob!" he cried.

There was no answer. Below him was nothing but yawning empty space.

"Bob!" he called again frantically.

There was movement just to Pete's left. Bob's face peered up through thick bushes.

"I'm all right . . . I guess," Bob said weakly. "I'm on a kind of ledge. Only . . . I can't move my leg!"

"Try moving it just a little."

Pete waited while he saw faint movement in the bushes where Bob lay. Then Bob's voice came more strongly.

"I don't think it's bad," Bob reported. "I can move it. It was just twisted under me. It hurts, but not so much."

"Do you think you can crawl back up?" Pete asked after a minute.

"I don't know, Pete. It's awful steep."

"And if we slip——" Pete did not have to finish that statement.

"I guess we'd better try yelling," Bob said.

"Loud," agreed Pete.

He opened his mouth to yell, but what came out was only a faint whisper. For just as he started to shout he spied a long face peering down from the edge of the road above. A face with a wicked scar and an eye patch!

The boys and the man with the scarred face stared at each other for a full ten seconds. Then, abruptly, the face vanished and they heard the sound of running feet, a car engine, and the squeal of tyres as the car roared away.

Its motor had scarcely faded out of hearing when the boys heard other vehicles approaching.

"Yell!" Pete cried.

Both boys shouted as loud as they could, and the sound echoed through the mountains. Brakes squealed and gravel crunched above. Two kindly faces peered over the edge of the road.

Soon a thick rope came flying down to Pete. He wrapped it twice around his waist, held the loose end in both hands, and was pulled up to the road. The rope was thrown down again, and a moment later Bob stood beside Pete.

Bob tested his leg and decided it was probably

only sprained. The burly truck driver who had supplied the rope was going in the direction of The Crooked-Y, and he insisted that the boys accept a ride with him. Less than fifteen minutes later they were deposited with their bikes at the front gate of the ranch. They waved their thanks to the truck driver, and limped up to the porch of the ranch house.

Mrs. Dalton came out of the house and stared at them. "Good heavens! What happened? Your clothes are a sight!"

Pete started to answer when he felt a light kick from Bob.

"We went downhill too fast and fell off our bikes in the pass, ma'am," Bob explained, which was more or less true. "I hurt my leg a little, so a man gave us a ride."

"Your leg?" Mrs. Walton said. "Let me see, Bob."

Like most ranch women Mrs. Dalton was a good practical nurse. She pronounced Bob's leg uninjured except for a mild sprain. No doctor would be needed, but Bob would have to rest his leg as much as possible. Mrs. Dalton sat him on the porch in a comfortable chair and brought him a pitcher of lemonade.

"But you can get to work, Pete Crenshaw," she said. "Mr. Dalton isn't back yet so you can start by haying the horses in the front corral."

"Yes, ma'am," Pete said hastily.

Bob sat in the shade with his leg up on a chair and grinned while his friend worked in the hot sun. Pete glared at the smaller boy, but he didn't really mind. It felt good to be working with his muscles in the warm sun.

Just before supper-time Jupiter pulled up in the truck from his uncle's salvage yard with big, blond Konrad at the wheel. Pete helped Jupiter unload the

scuba equipment and store it in the barn along with another small, mysterious bundle.

Konrad stayed for supper, and Mr. Dalton admired the enormous stature and muscles of Titus Jones's Bavarian helper.

"How would you like to work on a ranch, Konrad?" Mr. Dalton said. "If I had you with me, I could afford to lose ten hands."

"You need help, maybe for a few weeks," Konrad said, "Mr. Titus let Hans and me come to help, sure."

Mr. Dalton thanked him. "I hope it won't come to that. I'm sure this will all blow over soon. Young Castro says he isn't frightened, and he's going to talk to the men when he comes out of the hospital."

"That's wonderful, Jess," Mrs. Dalton said.

Mr. Dalton turned suddenly gloomy. "But I'm not sure there's time. The men may all be gone by then if these accidents continue. The sheriff hasn't come up with any ideas about Moaning Valley. He said El Diablo had no children he knows about, and he can't identify that man the boys saw."

"I'm sure an explanation will be found soon," Professor Walsh said encouragingly. "Reason will prevail over superstition as soon as the men start to think. Time—that is the healer."

"I wish I could be sure of that," Mr. Dalton said.

The adults started talking about other things, and when supper was over Konrad left to drive back to Rocky Beach. Professor Walsh had to deliver a lecture at the university, and the Daltons had to go over the ranch accounts. The boys went up to their room.

The instant they closed the door, Bob and Pete gathered around Jupiter.

"What's the plan?" Pete demanded.

"Was it a diamond?" Bob asked.

Jupiter grinned. "It's a diamond all right, just as I thought. A large industrial-type diamond, not worth much; but the expert in Los Angeles was most surprised when I told him where I had discovered it. He found it pretty difficult to believe. He said he would have thought it was an African stone. I left it with him for various tests. He will call me here as soon as he completes his study."

"Wow!" Pete exclaimed.

"Did you get the candles and sombreros?" Jupiter asked.

"We sure did," Pete said.

"And a book about Moaning Valley," Bob added.

The two boys told Jupiter about their trip to Santa Carla and the car that had forced them off the road.

"Did you get the licence number?" Jupiter asked immediately.

"Believe me, Jupe, there wasn't time," Pete said, "but I did notice that it was a different plate—sort of blue and white."

"HMMMMM," Jupiter mused, "probably a Nevada plate. And you say the scar-faced man looked down at you?"

"Probably came back to finish the job, but the other cars scared him off," Pete said angrily.

"Perhaps," Jupiter said thoughtfully. "And you also saw the professor in town?"

"And Old Ben and his partner, Waldo," Bob pointed out.

"Of course the top of the pass is only a few miles from here," Jupiter mused. "Anyone from the ranch or the valley could have driven up there in just a few minutes and probably not have been missed."

"Gee, I guess so," Bob agreed.

"Still," Jupiter went on thoughtfully, "a Nevada

licence plate is most interesting. As far as we know, no one around the ranch has anything but a California plate."

"You mean there's someone around here we don't know?" Pete said.

"Sure there is," Bob told him. "That man with the eye patch."

"It looks that way," Jupiter agreed, "but now we must get to work. I'll look through that book on Moaning Valley while you two go down and check the scuba equipment. Wrap the tanks in something that will disguise them, and then put them on the bikes with the candles, the sombreros and the bundle I brought."

"The plan!" Bob and Pete said together. "What is it?"

"I'll tell you on the way," Jupiter said, and looked at his prized chronometer. "We have to hurry now if we're going to reach Moaning Valley before sundown. To-night we may solve the mystery of Moaning Valley!"

Half an hour later the First Investigator appeared in the barn, waving the book at Bob and Pete.

"I think I've found part of the answer," Jupiter announced. "It says here that about fifty years ago they sealed up many of the old mine shafts in Devil Mountain. They had never found any gold or anything else, so they closed the tunnels. Fifty years ago was when the original moaning sound stopped!"

"You mean one of them has been opened up again?" asked Bob. "And the wind blowing through it causes the moaning sound?"

"Yes, I think so," Jupiter agreed. "The question is how and why? . . . Are you fellows ready?"

"Ready, Jupe," Pete said.

"All right, then put on the sombreros before you ride out of the barn," Jupiter instructed.

The boys donned the wide-brimmed straw hats and balanced the heavy tanks disguised in burlap sacks and mounted their bikes. The bikes proved somewhat hard to handle with the weight on them, and it was clear that they would have to pedal with care.

"Ohhh," Bob cried, wincing with pain.

"Is it your ankle, Bob?" asked Pete.

"It's all the weight on the bike," Jupiter decided.

Bob nodded unhappily. "I don't think I can make it, Jupe. I guess I'll have to stay behind."

Jupiter had his thoughtful look. "No, I don't think you will have to stay behind, Bob. Perhaps we can turn this misfortune into an advantage. It will make our deception more convincing."

"What deception?" Pete asked, bewildered.

"The classic military tactic of the camp-fires and logs that look like cannon," Jupiter explained obscurely. "Bob, unload your scuba equipment. Without the weight I think you can operate the bike."

Bob tried again and found that without the extra weight he could indeed pedal satisfactorily. The boys rode out of the barn towards the gate. As they passed the house Mrs. Dalton waved from the porch.

"Have a good time, boys, and don't stay out too late!" she called. "And be careful!"

Once out of sight of the ranch, the boys pedalled faster towards Moaning Valley. When they reached the place where the road ended at the iron gate, they dismounted and carried their bundles and their bikes into the thick bushes.

"Now," Jupiter said, "here is my plan. We're going to get inside the cave without being seen."

Pete nodded. "I get it. We'll take the moaning by surprise."

"Right," said Jupe. "Of course, if my theory is correct we're being watched closely right now!"

"Gosh," Bob said, "then how do we do it?"

"We go under water," Jupiter told them, "using the scuba equipment. I checked on the tide and it's higher this evening. I estimate that most of the tunnel from the beach will be under water."

"But, Jupe," Bob objected, "how will we get into the water without being seen if we're being watched now?"

Jupiter beamed triumphantly. "We will use the decoy tactic. The way armies used to light camp fires at night, and then slip away in the dark."

"But——" Pete began.

"You see," Jupiter went on, "I also noticed last night that while the trail to the right is in clear view from the top of Devil Mountain, the trail to the left is hidden. Come on. Walk casually and in the open."

The three boys climbed over the iron gate and continued down the cliff path to the left. When they were just out of sight from the top of Devil Mountain, Jupiter said, "Stop here." The boys put down the scuba tanks, and watched as Jupiter opened the secret package

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are us, especially since Bob will stay here with the and move from time to time!"

Quickly the boys set up the dummies above the trail. Bob sat beside the dummies, pretending to talk to them. From a distance it would look exactly as if The Three Investigators were sitting at the cliff edge observing the view.

Hidden below the cliff, Jupiter and Pete slipped down the trail to the small beach at the bottom. There they struggled into their air-tanks.

"The surf is light to-night," Jupiter said. "We should have no trouble swimming from here to the cave entrance."

Pete nodded. "Underwater it shouldn't take more than five minutes to swim that far with our flippers."

"Right," Jupiter agreed. "I have my compass and if necessary we can surface briefly. Our decoys should keep anyone from bothering to watch the ocean."

The boys fixed their breathing tubes in their mouths, walked backwards into the water, and slipped beneath the waves.

Under the Sea

They followed Jupiter's waving fins through the clear, translucent water. Both boys were experienced scuba divers and swam only with the minimum of motion. Pete maintained a steady course in the dark shadow of the cliff. Jupiter concentrated on following the compass.

Fish darted across

which had been invisible against the bottom, startled Pete by separating itself from the rocks and swimming majestically away.

After a couple of minutes, Jupiter stopped and turned to face Pete. He pointed to his diving chronometer and then towards the shore. Pete nodded. It was time to start in for El Diablo's Cave.

Jupiter continued to lead the way. Closer to shore the water was murky, and there were more rocks, so Pete swam closer to the flapping fins in front of him. In fact, he swam so close that he bumped hard into Jupiter's back when the First Investigator suddenly stopped.

Pete grunted, a little annoyed. His annoyance abruptly vanished as he saw that Jupiter was frantically pointing to the left. Pete looked.

A dark shape moved slowly through the water no more than thirty feet from them. It was large and long, like a big, black, hazy cigar—the shape of a shark or even a killer whale!

Pete's heart thudded. But the boys had been carefully instructed about what to do if they ran into a shark. They reacted to their training instantly. Moving as little as possible, since movement would attract a shark, they sank to the bottom. They drew their diving knives as a precaution, and began to edge their way slowly towards the safety of the rocks.

Pete watched the shape intently. He decided that it moved too steadily, too rigidly in a straight line, and was too long for a shark. At the same time, it seemed too small and slow for a killer whale.

Jupiter touched him on the shoulder and made the sign for a shark. Pete shook his head and both boys watched the strange shape slowly fade away out to sea. Then they swam in until the surge of the surf told them they were close to the cliff of El Diablo.

tain. They surfaced cautiously and found themselves only a few feet from the cave mouth.

"What was it?" Jupiter asked as soon as he removed his mouthpiece.

"I don't know," Pete replied nervously. "I'm pretty sure it wasn't a shark or whale or any kind of fish. Maybe we should go back, Jupe, and get the sheriff."

"If a whole posse came here they wouldn't find anything," Jupiter pointed out. "Whatever that shape was it was going away, right? I'm sure that there is some simple explanation for it and, anyway, it's gone now."

"Well . . ." Pete hesitated.

"Now that we're this far, it would be foolish to turn back without investigating the moaning," Jupiter said decisively. He always hated to give up once he was on a trail.

"Come on, Pete. I'm going into the cave. You hold the rope until I'm inside."

Jupiter vanished under the water. The sun was almost down now, and in the darkening twilight Pete waited with the rope in his hands. When he felt a double tug, he fixed his mouthpiece in place and swam into the narrow passage.

There was little surf and no current and Pete's waterproof flashlight, which was fastened to his gear, gave plenty of illumination. The water in the tunnel became quickly shallow as the floor angled upward, and soon Pete was standing in the large cavern beside his friend. The first thing he noticed as he took off his swim fins was the sound.

"Aaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh — oooooooooooooooooooooo — oooooo — oo!"

The cave was moaning!

Jupiter was grinning like a contented cat. They were inside and the cave was actually moaning.

"Gosh, Jupe," Pete whispered, "you were right! No one saw us come inside, so the cave's moaning."

"It certainly seems that way, doesn't it?" Jupiter said somewhat smugly. "And it's just about twilight—the exact time of our first visit here last night. Come on!"

Quickly they took off their diving gear. Jupiter struck a match from his waterproof box and lighted two of the candles.

"We'll carry the candles to the mouths of all the tunnels that lead out of this cavern," Jupiter explained. "If the candle flickers it means there is a current of air moving through the tunnel. If the flame doesn't move, that means the passage is probably blocked. It will save us a great deal of time and wasted searching."

Pete nodded. "Smart idea!"

Quickly they began to test the passages. At one, the candle flickered slightly. But Jupe was not satisfied. Pete went into the next tunnel. Suddenly the flame of his candle was drawn strongly into the dark opening.

"Here, Jupe!" Pete called excitedly.

"Shhhhhhh!" whispered Jupiter. "We don't know how close we may be to somebody."

Both boys held their breath and listened. For a long half-minute all was silent and Pete was furious at himself for shouting. Then the moan came again. faint.

the entrance to the passage. Then the two boys lit their flashlights and plunged into the tunnel.

Back at the cliff top, Bob sat with the dummies watching the flaming orange sun set in the west. Slowly, a purple and red twilight settled over the ocean. Bob stretched his legs cautiously.

He had been sitting there talking to himself for over a half-hour, he guessed, and during all that time he had had the feeling that eyes were watching him. He knew that it was probably just his imagination, but it was a weird feeling anyway.

To occupy his mind, Bob began to read the book about Moaning Valley. He read the part that told of the mine shafts being sealed, and then he read further. Suddenly he sat up very straight.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed in a whisper.

He had come to a passage about Old Ben Jackson and his partner, Waldo Turner. The book said that Old Ben and his partner lived on a ridge right next to Devil Mountain and that they had dug one of the mine shafts into the mountain. Their shaft had been sealed up with the others, but Old Ben and Waldo had refused to leave. They insisted they would keep prospecting for gold—and diamonds!

Bob frowned. He was sure that Jupiter, in his eagerness to get started on his plan, had not read this far in the book. If Jupe had read that Old Ben thought there were diamonds around Devil Mountain, he would have mentioned it.

In the growing darkness Bob was suddenly worried. Jupiter thought that the moaning might be caused by the reopening of one of the old shafts. Old Ben and his partner had actually dug such a shaft themselves, and they probably knew El Diablo's Cave better than anyone else, after living right next to it for

so many years. It would be simple for them to reopen a shaft.

Then Bob thought about something else. He remembered how Old Ben had surprised them the previous night. They had been inside an *inner* cavern, yet Old Ben had claimed he was passing by *outside* the cave and heard them! Suddenly, Bob realized that this would have been practically impossible. The distance was too great. Old Ben must have been inside the cave when he heard them, which meant that he had lied to them.

Alarmed now, Bob dropped below the trail and hurriedly made a third dummy from the shirt, pants and sombrero that had originally been intended to represent him. Carefully, he pushed it into place beside the other two. In the dim twilight the three dummies should convince any observer that the boys were still seated there.

Then he crept through the underbush until he felt it was safe to stand up and walk. He kept a good distance from the road, for he did not want to be seen. He felt it was very important that he get back to tell the Daltons what Pete and Jupe were doing in the cave. If Old Ben had actually found a diamond mine, they could be in real danger!

Bob hurried through the night as fast as he could with his injured leg and the difficult terrain. Before he had gone more than a few hundred yards he heard a soft sound in the night. It was a car driving slowly along the dirt road—without lights! It stopped no more than fifty feet from where Bob crouched.

A shadowy figure got out and walked towards Devil Mountain. The dark shape was completely in black, and was all but invisible in the night. It quickly vanished.

Bob crept up to the parked car. It had a Nevada licence plate.

Deep inside Devil Mountain, Pete and Jupe continued to track the moaning sound. After the first tunnel, they had come to another cavern and had again used their candles to locate the passage out. In the third cavern, smaller than any of the others, they had found three passages with air blowing through them. They decided not to split up. Instead, they searched each passage together.

The first tunnel ran straight ahead for quite a distance, then made a sudden, sharp turn.

"It's heading back towards the ocean, Jupe," Pete observed.

Jupiter frowned. "I don't think we want to go that way. I'm sure the moaning sound comes from close to the valley side." He checked his compass. "We should go east or north-east, I think."

"This tunnel is heading south-west."

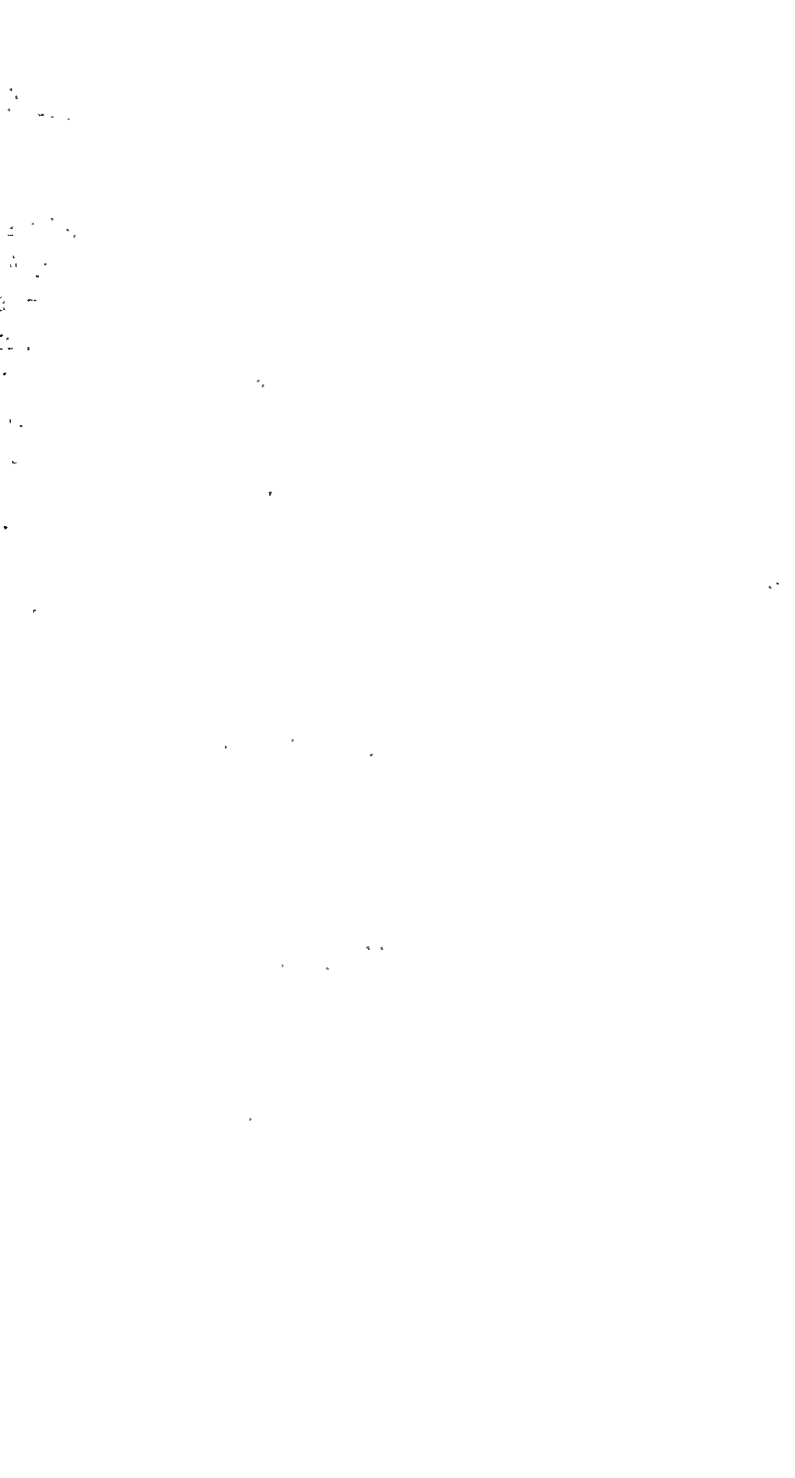
The boys retraced their steps and tried the second passage. Soon it, too, curved away towards the south-west. Once again they went back to the cavern. Pete was becoming impatient.

"Golly, Jupe, we could walk around in here forever!"

"Yes, but I'm sure we're on the right track. The moaning gets louder every time we move east."

Reluctantly Pete followed him into the third passage. The air current was strong and the moaning much louder. The tunnel went straight east! Jupiter pushed ahead as fast as was safe with only their flashlight. Suddenly both boys stopped in their tracks.

There was a gaping hole in the left wall, where a side passage joined the tunnel they were in.



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"Gosh," Pete said, "that's the first side tunnel we've seen."

"Yes," Jupiter replied, examining it with his flashlight, "and it's man-made—an old mine shaft that wasn't sealed at this end. Pete, look!"

The flame of Jupiter's candle was blowing strongly outward.

"What does that mean, Jupe?"

"It means," Jupiter whispered excitedly, "that somewhere down there is a third opening to the outside! Probably one of the old mine entrances has been secretly opened."

"Then why didn't the sheriff find it? Or Mr. Dalton?"

"I'm not sure, Pete," Jupiter admitted, "but——" His eyes suddenly widened as he listened to something.

Then Pete heard it, too—a faint sound of digging.

"Come on," Jupiter whispered, and started into the new passage.

As Pete prepared to follow, he suddenly became aware of the sound of footsteps behind him.

"Jupe," he quavered weakly.

Standing there, close behind them, was a small, thin man with burning dark eyes and a proud face—the face of little more than a boy. He wore a black sombrero, a short black jacket, a high-necked black shirt, and tight black trousers that flared at the bottom above shiny black boots.

He was the young man in the picture Professor Walsh had shown them at the ranch. El Diablo!

And he held a pistol in his left hand.

Caught!

"YIPES!" cried Pete.

El Diablo pointed his pistol at Pete and made a sharp cutting motion in the air with his other hand.

"He wants us to be silent," Jupiter said, a little shakily.

El Diablo nodded. His boyish face showed no expression at all. He motioned with the pistol that he wanted the boys to walk ahead of him in the direction from which they had come, away from the sound of digging.

Reluctantly the two boys obeyed. They retraced their steps through the dark tunnel until they came to a cavern, where El Diablo motioned them to stop on the right.

They walked and walked, along passages through caverns. Although Pete knew by his watch that they had travelled for less than five minutes, it seemed more like five hours as he plodded along behind Jupiter. El Diablo, with his pistol, stayed behind them.

"Halt!"

The command came sharply just as Pete and Jupiter entered another cavern. It was the first time El Diablo had spoken and it had a muffled, hoarse sound.

The boys stopped. This cavern was smaller than most they had been in, and it had a gloomy, oppressive atmosphere.

"There!" El Diablo commanded in his muffled voice.

The bandit gestured towards a very narrow opening

ing in the cavern wall. Jupiter and Pete looked at each other grimly, but there was nothing they could do. They marched into the narrow tunnel, with El Diablo close behind. They had taken only about ten steps when they came to a mound of rocks that completely blocked the passage. A dead-end! Pete and Jupiter turned in dismay.

El Diablo's face was as rigid as stone. With a motion of his pistol, he indicated that they were to stand along the left wall. Then he quickly bent over and rolled a large rock away from the mound.

"Come!" the muffled voice commanded.

The boys walked to the hole that had been opened in the end of the passage, and Pete peered in. He saw nothing but a black hole. Before he could shine his flashlight inside, a strong shove sent him sprawling into the dark opening.

Pete landed hard on a stone floor. Something struck him in the ribs, and then he heard the stone being rolled back. Pete lay in total darkness behind the wall of rock.

"Pete?" It was Jupiter's voice beside him.

"I'm here," Pete answered, "but I wish I wasn't."

"I'm afraid he's walled us in," Jupe whispered in the darkness.

"I'm just plain afraid," Pete said.

At the edge of Moaning Valley, Bob was hurrying towards The Crooked-Y Ranch. Behind him, as if to spur him on, the valley continued to moan.

"Aaaaaahhhhhhhh — oooooooooo — ooooooo — oo!"

Bob knew this meant that Jupiter's plan had worked. Pete and Jupe must be inside El Diablo's Cave by this time, yet the moaning had not stopped. After reading the book, however, Bob was almost sorry that the plan had succeeded. If his hunch was

right, if Old Ben and his partner had something to do with the moaning sound, then Pete and Jupe could be in trouble.

Then there was the man in the car with the Nevada licence plate. Who was he? Bob had seen only a dark shape walking towards Devil Mountain. He had waited for a time near the car, but the man had not come back. Bob had finally decided that too much was happening for the boys to carry on alone.

He hurried on towards the ranch. Once Moaning Valley was behind him, Bob decided to risk walking on the road, where he could make better time. Gradually the moaning faded in the distance. Then he heard a new sound behind him. A car was coming fast along the narrow dirt road. Just in time, Bob jumped for the cover of the bushes at the side of the road.

As the car roared past, he could not make out the face of the man bent close over the steering wheel, but he saw a black sombrero on the head. He also saw that it was the car with the Nevada licence plate.

Alarmed, Bob hurried back on to the road. The Nevada car had been in a hurry. What had happened inside Devil Mountain? With a sinking feeling, Bob began to trot as fast as his injured leg would let him. He had to get to the ranch house right away. Maybe even Jupiter had gone too far this time.

"Uf—ooof!"

Bob had bumped headlong into a man who appeared suddenly in the road. Strong hands gripped his shoulders. He looked up into the long, scarred face of the man with the black eye patch.

Jupiter and Pete crouched in the darkness behind the wall of rock. From time to time they could still hear the moaning of the cave, distant and faint.

"Can you see anything?" Pete whispered.

"Not a thing. We're totally walled in, and—— Hey, are we crazy or something!" Suddenly Jupiter started to laugh.

"Gosh, Jupe, what's so funny?" Pete whispered.

"We're whispering," Jupiter said, "and sitting in the dark, but there's no one to hear us and we have our flashlights!"

The boys switched on their flashlights and grinned a little sheepishly at each other. Then Pete shone his light on the wall of rock.

"Maybe no one can hear us, and we have our lights, but how do we get out?" Pete asked.

Jupiter, as usual, refused to be discouraged. "First we'll see if we can push that big rock out. El Diablo did not appear to be exceptionally strong, yet he moved the stone with ease."

Pete tried to move the stone first. It would not budge. Then Jupiter joined him, and together the two boys applied all their strength. The boulder still did not move an inch. Panting, they finally gave up.

"He must have it wedged from the outside," Jupiter observed. "The more we push, the tighter we wedge it. He's locked us in tight."

"Great," Pete said. "What do you think, Jupe? Could he really be El Diablo? You know, the professor said he might still be alive."

"El Diablo may still be alive," Jupiter said, "but he wouldn't look like that. Remember, El Diablo would be almost a hundred years old. The man who caught us looked like El Diablo back in the 1880s!"

"Yes, I thought about that."

"In addition," Jupiter continued, "did you notice how his face never seemed to move? How he never showed any expression?"

"Sure I did, but——"

"I'm convinced that our captor was wearing a mask, Pete!" Jupiter said triumphantly. "One of those flesh-coloured rubber masks that fit over the whole face. In addition, he spoke very little. I think he was afraid we might recognize his voice."

"I didn't. Did you, Jupe?"

"No," Jupiter admitted. "But I'm sure of one thing, anyway. He didn't want to harm us seriously, or he wouldn't have just imprisoned us in here."

"*Just* imprisoned us!" Pete objected. "Isn't that bad enough?"

"He could have done a lot worse," Jupiter pointed out a little grimly. "In here we'll be found sooner or later after we're missed, and he knows that. There's plenty of air. All he wanted was to have us out of the way for a short time, probably just to-night. Which means that we have to hurry and find our way out of here."

"Do you think it's safe yet, Jupe? Why don't we just let someone find us?" Pete asked.

"I'm convinced that the mystery has to be solved to-night," Jupiter insisted. "If we wait, it will be too late. Since we can't get out the way we came in, we have to see if going in the other direction leads us to some exit. Come on."

Pete followed Jupiter down the narrow passage. The tunnel continued straight ahead without any cross passages for what seemed like miles. Then suddenly the boys stopped and stared at each other in dismay. In front of them was another fall of rock. The passage was blocked at this end, too!

"Golly, Jupe!" Pete cried. "What do we try now?"

"I hadn't thought we would be blocked in so completely," the First Investigator said, and for the first

time his round face looked worried. "It doesn't fit my deductions at all."

"Maybe El Diablo has different deductions," Pete observed.

Jupiter leaned down and carefully inspected the fall of rock. It, like all the others, was not recent. Jupiter bent closer. Suddenly he became excited.

"Pete, this big rock has been moved!"

Pete bent down and looked. From the marks on the floor there was no doubt that the big rock had been moved recently.

Together the boys strained at the boulder. It rocked slightly, but would not roll loose. Jupiter stood up and looked around.

"I think our friend used this passage to enter and leave the cave unseen. If the two of us can't move it then there has to be some other way. . . . There! The long steel bar near the wall!"

Pete understood at once. A lever! He grabbed the long bar and inserted it between the stone and the wall. Together the two boys leaned their weight on it and the great stone rolled away.

A gaping hole opened in front of them. Jupiter shone his light into the darkness.

"It's another cavern," he reported.

Pete dropped the long bar and both boys scrambled through the opening. They shone their flashlight around.

"Wow!" gasped Pete.

Jupiter just stared.

They were standing in an enormous cavern. In the centre was a great black pool.

The Pool of The Old One

The pool glittered in the beams of their flashlights.

Pete swallowed hard. "The pool," he said in a low voice, "where The Old One lives."

"So there is a pool," Jupiter said. "It must have been blocked off a long time ago, but the Indians knew it was in the cave somewhere."

"And now we know, too, but I wish we didn't," Pete quavered. "Let's find a way out of here quick!"

"Just because the pool is really here doesn't mean that The Old One actually exists."

"It doesn't mean The Old One *doesn't* exist, either," Pete pointed out. "Maybe The Old One's been blocked off a long time, too. Maybe he's mad and hungry and just waiting for two smart boys."

Jupiter glanced around the dark cavern. Shadows in the wall indicated more passages leading from the cavern.

"We'd better try to find a way out," Jupiter decided. "Light your candle and we'll test the openings."

"Now that's what I like to hear," Pete said.

He lit his candle and followed Jupiter. They tested two of the passages without success. Pete started to move on, but Jupiter stood still.

"Pete," he whispered.

Pete followed Jupiter's gaze. At first he could see nothing.

"There, against the wall," Jupiter hissed. "It's . . . it's . . ."

Then Pete saw it—or rather, him! In a dark recess

just inside the second passage, seated against the wall with his legs straight out in front of him was a small man, dressed all in black, with a sombrero on his head, and black boots on his feet. In his right hand the man held an ancient pistol, and his face was grinning straight at the boys.

Except that the face looking at them was not a face at all—it was a skull! And the hand that held the pistol was not a hand, it was five bones—a skeleton!

"Yow!" Pete cried. Both boys turned and ran. They reached the tunnel which had led them into the cavern and tried to scramble through the opening together. Both of them went down in a heap. "Where are we running to, Jupe?" mumbled bottom. "We can't get out this way!"

"Of course," replied Jupiter. "We were clearly."

"I wasn't thinking, period," Pete said in voice. "Maybe you better get off me for

"I would, but you're holding my leg."

The boys untangled themselves, and the cold floor of the cavern. They were still. Pete began to grin.

"Boy, we're a couple of brave investi-

Jupiter nodded solemnly. "We panicked. A natural enough reaction under the circumstances, I think. The accumulation of dangers resulted in a degree of nervousness that made us lose our rational responses. A skeleton is probably the least dangerous menace we have faced. We were simply at the point of panic."

Pete groaned. "It's too bad Bob isn't here to tell me what you just said."

"If he was here he'd tell you I said we were so tense from what's happened that we blew our tops," Jupiter said.

"You could have said that the first time."

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"Of course," replied Jupiter. "We weren't thinking clearly."

"I wasn't thinking, period," Pete said in a muffled voice. "Maybe you better get off me for a start."

"I would, but you're holding my leg," Jupiter said.

The boys untangled themselves, and sat up on the cold floor of the cavern. They were still shaking, but Pete began to grin.

"Boy, we're a couple of brave investigators!"

Jupiter nodded solemnly. "We panicked. A natural enough reaction under the circumstances, I believe. The accumulation of dangers resulted in a degree of nervousness that made us lose our rational responses. A skeleton is probably the least dangerous menace we have faced. We were simply at the point of panic."

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"If he was here he'd tell you I said we were so tense from what's happened that we blew our tops," Jupiter said.

"You could have said that the first time."

"I could have, but it isn't exactly the meaning I wanted to communicate. However, that isn't what we should be concerned about now. I want to inspect that skeleton."

"I was afraid you'd want to do that." Pete followed Jupiter rather unwillingly over to where the skeleton seemed to grin at them from beneath the black sombrero. Warily, Jupe reached out and touched the sombrero. It crumbled into dry pieces.

"Golly!" Pete exclaimed, and touched the black jacket.

The jacket, too, crumbled and fell away from the skeleton. As Pete pulled his hand back, he brushed the bony fingers that held the gun. The fingers snapped off, and the pistol dropped to the floor with a loud, echoing clatter. Pete jumped back, but Jupiter bent closer to the skeleton.

"It's very old, Pete," Jupiter observed. "And that pistol is ancient too. . . . I would say that there is very little doubt about it."

"Very little doubt about what?"

"That this skeleton is El Diablo—the real El Diablo!" Jupiter's words echoed from the high ceiling of the cavern like some ghostly voice from the past.

"The real El Diablo?" Pete said. "You mean he was in here all the time but no one ever found him?"

Jupiter nodded. "I wouldn't be surprised if he died the very night he came into the cave. His wound must have been worse than anyone realized. Of course, in those days men often died from wounds we would consider minor today. Medical science has made great progress."

"But what makes you think he died that night?" Pete asked, puzzled. "I mean, maybe he hid in here for years before he died."

Jupiter shook his head. "No, I don't believe so. First, you will notice that there are no signs of any food around the skeleton. He could have drunk water from the pool, although I would guess that the pool is salt water. Anyway, even if he had water there should be some evidence of food: bones, dried seeds, something."

"Maybe he ate and drank somewhere else," Pete suggested.

"Perhaps, but then what killed him? If he was in good health and was attacked there should be signs of a fight, and perhaps another skeleton or two. Also, if anyone had found El Diablo in the cave and killed him, surely the historical record would show that."

"Gee, I guess you're right," Pete agreed.

"In addition," Jupiter went on, "note the position of the skeleton. He literally died with his back to the wall. He was seated here ready to fight if any enemy appeared, but I don't think an enemy ever came. Look at the pistol."

Pete picked up the pistol. "It's full, Jupe. No shots fired."

"Just as I thought," Jupiter said in triumph. "His place of hiding was never discovered and he died alone in here of his wounds, just as the historical record states. Everything is consistent with that conclusion. El Diablo did know the cave better than anyone else."

"Maybe it would have been better for him if he hadn't known it so well," said Pete. "I mean, maybe if they'd found him they could have taken care of his wound."

"Perhaps, but you'll recall he was under sentence to hang anyway. I imagine he preferred dying in his cave to being recaptured. He may even have guessed

that if he was never found his legend would grow and perhaps in some way help his people."

"It sure grew," said Pete.

Jupiter nodded. "So much so that someone is using it to scare us—and anyone else who comes to the cave. The question is why?"

"Maybe someone wants to make Mr. and Mrs. Dalton lose their ranch," Pete suggested.

"That's possible," Jupiter conceded, "but I don't think so. I think someone is trying to scare people away from the cave. Remember that the Daltons have been here for some time, but the moaning only started a month ago."

"Golly, Jupe, if someone is trying to scare people away, how come no one saw the phoney El Diablo until to-night? I mean, why didn't he appear when the sheriff and Mr. Dalton explored the cave?"

"I don't know that yet," Jupiter admitted. "Until to-night the moaning always stopped when someone entered the cave. To-night we managed to enter unseen, the moaning did not stop, and the fake El Diablo appeared! This leads me to the deduction that we saw El Diablo to-night *because* the moaning did not stop."

"That makes less sense than anything else," Pete protested. "What do you think it means?"

For once Jupiter looked completely baffled. "I don't know, Pete. But I do know that there is more to the mystery of Moaning Valley than some natural cause for the moaning. We have to find out what the digging we heard earlier was all about."

"Gosh, I'd forgotten all about the digging. Do you really think there's a diamond mine in the cave?"

"I think someone is trying to conceal something," Jupiter explained. "Last night I found a diamond.

night we heard somebody digging. Logic indicates that a diamond mine must be involved somehow."

"Maybe we should tell Mr. Dalton what we know, Jupe," Pete said uneasily.

Jupiter frowned. The First Investigator hated to admit that they could not handle a situation on their own, but even he had to agree that there were times when three boys could not do the job alone.

"I suppose you're right," Jupiter said reluctantly. "Bring El Diablo's pistol and we'll try to find the tunnel that leads out of here."

Pete lit his candle, and the boys started for the next tunnel to test for a current of air.

Suddenly there was a faint ripple in the water of the pool that had been so dark and silent. This was followed by splashing and loud breathing. The boys stood motionless, their flashlights trained on the sound.

A black and shiny shape broke the surface of the murky pool. Water dripped from its shining skin, reflecting in the beams of the boys' flashlights, as the creature raised itself out of the water.

Jupiter and Pete stared in horror as the shiny black creature began to climb out of the pool.

14

The Black and Shiny Creature

"WHAT are you boys doing here?" the creature demanded.

Suddenly, at the same time, both boys realized what they were looking at. It was a man wearing a black rubber wet-suit, swim fins, a double air-tank painted black, and a black rubber mask that completely covered his face.

"Oh, boy!" Pete exploded in relief.

Jupiter, recovering immediately, drew himself to his full height, his round face suddenly looking much older. It was an old trick he used when dealing with adults, and it usually worked as well as his other surprises.

"What, sir, are *you* doing here?" he asked in his deepest voice. "We are here by permission of the owners of this ranch. You, apparently, have come by some secret entrance that leads from the sea. You are trespassing."

The skin-diver reached up and removed his rubber face mask. He was a handsome, blond man and was grinning at Jupiter. Unhooking his air-tanks, he laid them on the floor.

"Well, son, you sound almost as important as an admiral," he said. "I wasn't questioning your right to be here. I was just wondering what two boys were doing in El Diablo's Cave this late at night."

"The admiral?" Jupiter looked puzzled for a moment. "Of course! You're a frogman, aren't you? A Navy frogman on training manoeuvres with the ships out near the islands."

The frogman looked serious. "Yes, that's exactly what I am. We're on a highly secret training mission here. I'll have to swear you boys to complete secrecy. Have you seen anything in the water you thought was unusual?"

"No," Pete said.

"Nothing, sir," Jupiter assured him. Then, remembering suddenly, he snapped his fingers. "Except the shape!"

"Shape?" the frogman repeated.

Now Pete remembered too. "That long, black thing that passed us out in the ocean."

"It was a submarine, Pete!" Jupiter exclaimed.

eagerly. "A midget submarine. That was why it so rigid, and why it moved so steadily. But why did we hear its engines? Sound carries very far under water."

The frogman's face darkened. "This could be very serious, boys. That submarine you saw is top secret, especially the silence of its engines. I'm afraid we have to hold you."

"Hold us?" Pete echoed.

"A submarine that moves so silently that it cannot be detected by sonar is very important, Pete," Jupiter said solemnly. "However, I believe we can prove to you there is no need to hold us, Mr. . . ."

"Commander Crane," the frogman said. "Commander Paul Crane. And I'm sorry, but I am going to have to hold you—at least until the admiral has had you investigated."

Jupiter nodded understandingly and tried to look dignified, which wasn't easy when he was wearing only bathing trunks and a diving belt.

"We're Jupiter Jones and Pete Crenshaw," Jupiter said, and reached into one of the waterproof containers which hung from his diving belt. "I believe these credentials will attest to our complete reliability."

Jupiter handed the commander the boys' business card and the special deputy cards given to them by Chief Reynolds of the Rocky Beach police. Commander Crane studied the cards.

"We happen to be involved in an important case right now," Jupiter told him. "That is why we are in this cave. I'm sure your admiral would want you to co-operate with us, Commander."

Commander Crane looked at Jupiter and hesitated. The First Investigator could be very impressive when he was being serious and professional.

"Well now," the frogman said, "these cards do make you boys seem legitimate."

"Why don't you communicate with your ship," Jupiter suggested "and have them check at once with Chief Reynolds in Rocky Beach. I'm sure he will vouch for us."

"Gosh, Juve," Pete exclaimed, "how can the commander talk to his ship from in here?"

"A good frogman is always in contact with his ship," Jupiter informed Pete. "I assume that the commander has some form of long-range radio."

Commander Crane smiled. "You're a very smart boy, I see. All right, you boys just sit down and stay put."

Jupiter and Pete did as they were told, and Commander Crane vanished into the darkness. Minutes passed. The boys could barely see the frogman crouched in the dark of the cavern. He was bending over a tiny instrument of a type the boys had never seen before. Jupiter watched with curiosity, but he could not make out what was happening.

At last the commander straightened up again, replaced his instrument in a hidden pocket, and strode back to the boys. He was smiling.

"Security says you boys check out," he said. "You won't have to hold you."

"Gosh, you move fast," Pete said.

"We move fast when we have to," replied Commander Crane. "The admiral has pretty high priorities."

"Now that we've been approved, Commander," Jupiter said seriously, "may we ask you some questions?"

"Me?" The frogman shook his head, smiling. "I'm afraid that won't be possible, boys. My work is also highly secret."

"It's not about your work exactly, sir," Jupiter assured him. "I want to know about this cave. First was it you Pete saw last night up near the front of the cave?"

Commander Crane nodded. "It was probably one of my men. He reported that he had been spotted briefly."

"That makes me feel better," Pete said. "At least it explains another mystery of the cave."

"Second," Jupiter went on, "did you or your men make any changes inside the cave? I mean, did you change the layout of the cave, the various tunnels and openings, or anything like that?"

"No," the commander said, "I can tell you that much."

"Third, sir," Jupiter enumerated, "is anything you are doing causing the cave to moan as it does?"

"Absolutely not. We wondered about that moaning ourselves. Of course, we've only been in the cave a few times. We haven't been in this area long. We assumed the cave always moaned like that."

"And your work requires you to remain completely unseen if possible?" Jupiter pressed on.

"Absolutely." The commander smiled. "As a matter of fact, I'm sure we haven't been seen by anyone but you boys. Most of our work has been done on the ocean side of the cave, and here near this pool."

"Have you seen anyone else in the cave?" Jupiter asked.

Commander Crane shook his head. "No, it is essential to our training mission that we remain unseen. Of course, there is no enemy here, but we try to avoid any contact with anyone."

"Of course," Jupiter said with a sound of disappointment.

"I'm sorry, boys," Commander Crane said. "The

liked to have helped you. Can you find your way out of this cavern?"

"We've been trying to find our way," Pete blurted out. "That's what we were doing when we saw you."

"Well, I think I can set you on the right track," the commander said. "Remember, you must not talk about anything you have seen here involving our operation."

"Yes, sir!" Pete agreed.

"Of course, Commander," echoed Jupiter.

"All right, then, follow me." The frogman led the boys to one of the tunnel openings, then through several caverns and side passages until they emerged into the large cavern where Pete had first seen the mysterious black and shiny shape.

"All right, boys," Commander Crane said. "I expect you can make it from here. I must get back to my work."

"Thank you, sir," said Jupiter.

The frogman smiled at them. "And good luck with our work."

He vanished back into the small opening, and Pete started for the tunnel that he remembered led out to Floating Valley.

Jupiter made no move to follow. He was staring into empty space with that faraway look Pete knew only too well.

"Oh no!" Pete groaned. "Don't tell me, Jupe."

"I'm more certain than ever that we have to solve the mystery to-night, Pete," Jupiter said. "The man disguised as El Diablo knew we would find our way out eventually. That means he didn't care how much we knew as long as we couldn't get in his way until some hours from now."

"I don't want to get in his way at all," Pete observed, "but something tells me I'm going to."

"This is our real opportunity, Pete," Jupiter insisted. "Whoever is trying to scare people off thinks we're still out of the way! We'll never have a better chance to locate that digging and find out what makes the cave moan."

"I guess you're right," Pete said dubiously. "Only maybe we'd better go and get Mr. Dalton and the other men first."

"If we leave the cave we'll be seen," Jupiter pointed out. "Besides, there isn't time. We've got to move fast now with the advantages we have."

"Some advantage," Pete said, "but I guess you're right, Jupe. Where do we start? I mean, we've been here before, and we didn't know which way to go."

"But this time we have more information," Jupiter said confidently. "This time we know that the digging has something to do with the moaning."

"How do you figure that?" Pete asked, mystified.

"Because neither the sheriff nor the Daltons nor the newspaper mentioned a word about any digging. So whoever is digging is doing it in secret. By deduction, it has to be connected with the moaning sound because it is the only activity that goes on secretly in the cave when no one is here!"

"Well . . ." Pete remained unconvinced.

"Two unexplained facts in the same place almost certainly must be connected," Jupiter persisted.

Pete's eyes widened. "Sure, okay. What do we do then?"

"First, you can use your keen sense of direction to find that side passage where we heard the digging."

Pete nodded. Mentally he retraced their steps since they had been captured by El Diablo. At last he said,

"Jupe, I figure we have to find a passage that will take us north-west."

"That way," said Jupiter, looking at his compass and pointing to the left.

"Right," Pete confirmed. "Let's go!"

The two boys lit their candles, forgetting their earlier caution in the excitement of being so near to a solution of the mystery. As they approached the opening in the north-west wall, a sound came out to greet them.

"Aaaaaahhhhhhhh — oooooooo — oooooooo — ooo!"

"The moaning!" Pete whispered.

"It never stopped, Pete. We've just become accustomed to it."

"It seems closer now."

"Because it's coming from that tunnel!" Jupiter held his candle in the tunnel entrance. A strong draught of air blew the flame, and with it the moaning again.

"Aaaaaahhhhhhhh — oooooooo — oooooooo — ooo!"

The two boys plunged into the passage, which soon opened into a small cavern.

"I know where we are now, Jupe," Pete said in a low tone.

"Blow out your candle, then," whispered Jupiter. "We'll use our flashlights."

The boys covered their flashlights with their hands so that only a faint glow could be seen, and Pete led the way into the same tunnel through which the fake Diablo had taken them earlier. The moan grew louder as they walked.

"Aaaaaahhhhhhhh — oooooooo — oooooooo — ooo!"

As they approached the cross passage, they heard a sound of digging.

"Golly," Pete gulped. "We really did hear digging." "Of course we did. Come on!" whispered Jupiter.



Pete and Jupiter saw a figure through the hole.

They plunged ahead into the man-made tunnel, moving as silently as possible. It was long and straight. At the end of it they saw a glow of light. Jupiter motioned for Pete to slow down.

The glow of light came from a hole in the side wall of the mine shaft. Rocks and boulders lay in piles all around it. The sound of digging was coming from the hole.

Cautiously the boys crept forward and peered into the hole, blinking at the bright light.

At that moment the moaning came again—so loud that the sound was painful to their ears. It echoed all around them, then gradually died away.

"Gosh!" Pete whispered. "It hurts my ears."

Jupiter caught Pete's arm. "Look!"

Their eyes had adjusted to the bright light inside the cavern, and they could see a figure bending over with a shovel in his hand.

Pete gulped.

The figure suddenly straightened, put down his shovel, and picked up a pickaxe. For a moment he was clearly visible in the light of his electric lantern—a man with white hair and a flowing white beard. Old Ben Jackson.

Part of the Mystery Solved

THROUGH the opening in the side wall, Pete and Jupiter watched Old Ben working inside the secret cavern. Every few minutes, at irregular intervals, the moaning shattered their ears. The noise did not seem to bother the old man at all. He kept digging at the base of the cavern wall with his pickaxe.

"Look," Jupiter whispered. "It looks like another rock fall."

"It's a big one," Pete whispered back.

"You see how those breaks in the rocks are sharp and clean?" Jupiter pointed out. "That fall happened very recently."

Old Ben continued his work at the fall, unaware of the eyes watching him. The old prospector swung his axe with vigour and surprising strength for a man of his age. Then he put it down again, and picked up the shovel.

"Jupel" hissed Pete. "Look at his eyes."

The eyes of the old prospector gleamed wildly in the light of his electric lantern, just as they had the previous night when the old man had warned them against The Old One.

"Gold fever," Jupiter said softly, "or, in this case, diamond fever. I've read that prospectors often get like that when they think they have a strike. Nothing can get in their way or stop them."

"Gosh," Pete whispered.

Old Ben turned again to the wall and dug steadily at the fallen rock loosened by his pickaxe. He shoveled it into a kind of tilted sieve. Every few minutes, while the boys watched, he bent down and picked something out of the dirt. Each time, he examined the object, laughed wildly, and put it into a small leather bag near the electric lantern.

"Are they diamonds?" Pete whispered.

"I expect so," Jupiter responded in the same low voice. Old Ben was so involved in his work that he probably wouldn't have heard the boys if they had spoken normally, but they were taking no chances.

"Then he *has* found a diamond mine," Pete said.

Jupiter was staring at the rock fall, his round face furrowed with thought.

"It looks that way, Pete, only——"

"What else could it be? He's struck a diamond mine, and he knows it's on Crooked-Y property. If anyone found out about it he'd at least have to share the diamonds with the Daltons, wouldn't he? Maybe legally they all belong to Mr. and Mrs. Dalton. So he only digs at night, and he scares everyone away from the cave!"

Jupe nodded slowly. "I guess you're right, Pete. That explains everything except——"

"Except why the cave moans," Pete interrupted. "and what makes it stop when anyone comes in."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Jupiter said, "but I think I can explain why the moaning stops. You see, Sheriff and Mr. Dalton must have found this mine first all right. Only they didn't find the place where Ben is working."

As Pete opened his mouth to ask a question, a bell began to ring insistently in the hollow cave.

Old Ben dropped his shovel and moved with amazing speed to a small box near his lantern. He touched something on the box and the clanging bell stopped. Then he picked up his lantern and the small leather bag and headed straight for the hole in the wall where he and Jupiter were crouching.

"Quick, Pete!" Jupiter whispered urgently.

The two boys scrambled back to hiding places behind the loose mounds of rock in the shaft. They were too fast. They had barely got out of sight when Ben came through the hole in the wall. The old man laid down his lantern and leather bag, and picked up a long steel bar the boys had not noticed in the corner of the shaft.

At that moment the moan began once more.

Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhh — oooo ———"

But this time the spooky sound stopped before it was finished. Old Ben had rolled a large boulder into the opening, using the bar as a lever. With the rock in place there was no trace of the opening. And the moaning stopped abruptly!

"Gosh, Jupe," Pete said. "That's what you meant! No one could tell there was a hole in that wall."

The large boulder fitted tightly into the gap as if it had always been there.

"Right," Jupiter whispered, "and the blocking of the hole stops the moaning right away. That bell must be the signal from whoever is watching up on the mountain. I think it means someone is coming into the cave."

"Maybe Bob got scared and went for help," Pete said. "I hope."

Old Ben was pacing up and down in the mine shaft, muttering to himself. He didn't even glance towards the rocks where the boys were hiding. Then, suddenly, the old man switched off his lantern. For a moment there was no sound in the dark mine shaft; then the boys heard the pacing and muttering begin again. They waited tensely in their hiding place.

In the darkness, Pete tried to sort out everything he had learned that evening. There were still questions he wanted to ask Jupiter, but Pete thought he understood most of the answers to the mystery of Moaning Valley.

Old Ben was digging secretly in the cave. Up on the mountain someone was on guard. The moaning sound was produced by the wind blowing through the narrow opening of the prospector's secret cavern. When someone came to the cave, the guard signalled with the bell and Old Ben closed up the hole. The moaning sound stopped and there was no clue to what caused the moaning.

Pete felt quite pleased with himself for figuring all out. He had answered all the questions himself . . . or had he? Who, for instance, was the fake Diablo who had captured them? And how did he get into the puzzle? Was that what Jupe had been referring to when he said something was still unexplained?

"Petel!" Jupiter's voice whispered in his ear. "Someone is coming!"

Pete was so startled he almost lost his balance. He grabbed at the big rock in front of him, and a small stone rolled to the ground. Had Old Ben heard the noise? Pete held his breath.

A moment later he saw a bobbing light approaching.

"Waldo?" Old Ben's voice said from somewhere nearby.

"Yup," a voice replied from behind the bobbing light. "They's two of 'em coming in the cave, Ben. We best skedaddle."

Old Ben's lantern came on, and Jupiter and Pete could see the tall, thin figure of Waldo Turner. The boys crouched as low behind the rocks as they could get. The two old men stood less than ten feet from them now.

"You sure they're comin' in?" Old Ben asked.

"I'm sure. Too dang many people foolin' around this cave the last couple days," Waldo replied.

"Jumping bobcats!" Old Ben exclaimed. "And figure not more'n a few more days' work 'fore we're finished. Well, no sense gettin' careless now. We better get on out."

"We better," Waldo agreed.

It was clear that Waldo Turner was the man to watch on top of Devil Mountain. After giving the



A Tale of Diamonds

"JUST stay where you are," the man with the eye patch commanded. "If you start running around in the dark you'll get hurt."

Jupiter braved it out. "I doubt that you would care if I *were* hurt. I suggest you let us go. We have friends here."

The man laughed. "Spunky, aren't you? . . . Why don't you come over here where we can have a talk."

"Don't, Jupel!" Pete cried.

And then a familiar voice spoke from behind the flashlight of the second man.

"It's okay, fellows. Mr. Reston is a detective!"

The voice was Bob's and his face was one big grin when he came out into the light and saw the astonished looks of his partners.

"I started for the ranch to get help after I saw that the man in the Nevada car was going into the cave," Bob explained. He went on to describe his sudden hunch that Old Ben and Waldo were involved in the mystery of Moaning Valley. "After the Nevada car passed me I was scared and ran right into Mr. Reston here."

"Sam Reston," the man with the eye patch, introduced himself. "I'm a detective, boys, working for an insurance company. When your friend here told me of his suspicions about Old Ben, I decided to come back to the cave with him instead of going all the way to the ranch for help."

"Mr. Reston thought you might need help right away," Bob explained.

"I did," Reston said, "because the man I'm after is very dangerous. Bob and I tried to get into the cave unseen. It took us some time, and I think we were seen anyway."

"You were, Mr. Reston," Jupiter said, suddenly recovering his voice. The First Investigator told Bob and Mr. Reston about everything he and Pete had seen in the cave.

Reston nodded. "I was afraid we'd been spotted. But they can't have gone far, and that bag you saw probably contains the diamonds I'm after."

"What diamonds?" Pete burst out.

"That's the job I'm on, boys," Reston explained. "I'm trying to find a very clever jewel thief who stole a fortune in diamonds. His name is Laslo Schmidt, and he is known all over Europe. I followed his trail here to Santa Carla just a week ago. Then I heard about Moaning Valley and El Diablo's Cave, and I had the idea that the cave would be a good place for Schmidt to hide. Only I haven't found a trace of him."

"Gosh," Pete said, "if you followed his trail here, why couldn't you spot him?"

"Because I have no idea what he looks like now," Reston told them. "You see, boys, about five years ago Schmidt left Europe in a hurry. The International Police, Interpol, learned that he had come to America and assumed a new identity. But that was all they could find out. Schmidt is a master of disguise and impersonation. He could act the part of almost anyone and make you believe it."

Jupiter had his faraway thoughtful expression. "And he stole some diamonds insured by your company, Mr. Reston?"

"Yes, about a year ago. He hadn't stolen anything since he left Europe, and the police thought that he

had given up, or perhaps even died. But when the diamonds were stolen we knew at once that Schmidt was the thief. The way it was done, it could have been no one else."

"The *modus operandi*, or method of operation is very important," agreed Jupiter. "That is how most criminals are caught, especially professional thieves. A thief can never really change his way of committing a theft except in minor details."

"That's right, Jupiter," Reston acknowledged. "The theft was obviously the work of Laslo Schmidt, and we realized that he had been simply biding his time. It became clear that he had spent his years in this country establishing a new identity. So now he is actually two men: Schmidt the thief, and some other person who is perfectly normal and above suspicion."

"And you don't know what this other identity is," Bob put in quickly. "It could be anyone around here."

Reston nodded. "Exactly, Bob. I traced him through the sale of two of the diamonds. First to Reno, Nevada, and then here."

"Nevada!" Pete and Bob both exclaimed at once.

"Gosh," Pete added, "we thought *you* were driving that Nevada car that forced us over the cliff."

"No, boys," Reston explained. "I was on my way to Moaning Valley when I saw your bikes at the edge of the pass. I stopped to see what was wrong, and would have rescued you, but then I saw those other people coming and knew you'd be okay. At that time I didn't want to reveal my presence here. You see, I think Schmidt spotted me in Nevada. I tried to fool him by putting on this eye patch and pasting a false scar on my face before coming to Santa Carla. I'm not sure my disguise was successful, though."

"That's why you've been sort of hiding?" Bob asked.

"That's right. I didn't want Schmidt to know I was still on his trail."

While Reston had been talking, Jupiter had been staring off into the dark spaces of the cavern and biting his lip. Now an eager gleam came into his eyes.

"The diamonds he stole," Jupiter said slowly. "There is something special about them, isn't there, Mr. Reston?"

Reston looked at him in astonishment: "Why, yes Jupiter, there is: You see, they weren't stolen from any jewellery company or store. They were taken from a special display at a museum in San Francisco. They——"

"—— are rough diamonds!" Jupiter completed the sentence for him. "They are uncut, exactly as they came from the diamond mine, correct? They are also industrial diamonds."

"I don't understand how you know," Reston said "but you're right about their being rough diamonds. Only a few are just industrial stones, though. You see the display was made up of diamonds from all over the world, just as they came out of the ground. Because they look like ordinary rocks, and because they were in a museum, they were not very well-guarded. Schmidt had no trouble stealing them. Most of them are gemstones, very valuable and just about unidentifiable since they are rough. But how did you know Jupiter?"

"Because I found a rough diamond here in the cave," Jupiter said, "and because I think Old Ben and Waldo have found the rest of them!"

"Then the stones really are in the cave!" Reston exclaimed.

Jupiter nodded solemnly. "I think your Laslo Schmidt hid them here right after he stole them. He probably planned to keep them hidden until everyone gave up the chase. Only Old Ben and Waldo, prospecting secretly in the cave as they have probably been doing for years, found them and thought that they had uncovered a diamond mine!"

"But there are no diamond mines in this area," Reston pointed out.

"No, sir, but Old Ben and Waldo have always believed that there are diamonds here. I remember Mr. Dalton said they have been looking for precious stones as well as gold and silver. The diamonds Schmidt stole look exactly as they would if they had just been dug up, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," Reston admitted, "but wouldn't Ben and Waldo have suspected something odd when they found all the diamonds hidden in one place?"

Jupiter nodded eagerly. "Yes, but I don't think Old Ben found them that way! We are right on top of the San Andreas Fault here, as you know. The cave is filled with the debris of large earthquakes that occurred some years ago. We haven't had a large quake for many years, but small ones are always happening."

"You mean you think there was an earthquake here just recently?" Pete asked.

"Yes, I do. I think that a small earthquake about a month ago disturbed the hiding place of the diamonds. Old Ben and Waldo, digging as usual, found the diamonds scattered in the dirt and thought that they had found a mine!"

"Wow!" Pete exclaimed.

Reston nodded. "Yes, it's quite possible. However, boys, you must remember that a detective has to consider *all* possible explanations, and there is another

possibility. Old Ben or Waldo may have stolen the diamonds themselves, and are now only recovering them after the earthquake buried them."

Jupiter reddened. "Of course, I should have considered that."

"But, Mr. Reston," Bob said, "Old Ben and Waldo have been here a long time! They're local characters. They couldn't have come from Europe only five years ago."

Reston smiled. "Remember, Bob, that I said Laslo Schmidt is a master of disguise and impersonation! He could be impersonating one of them."

"Gosh, of course," Bob agreed.

"However, I think there is only one way to find out," said Reston. "We'll go back to that cavern where Ben and Waldo were digging and see if we can find out where they went. But first, I think one of you boys had better go back to the ranch and call the sheriff. We're going to have evidence to show him."

Jupiter nodded. "I think Pete had better go."

Pete's face fell. "Just when we're going to finish the case!" he protested.

"Jupiter is right," Reston said. "Bob's leg isn't in good shape, and I want Jupiter with me. Besides, I can see that you're the fastest, Pete. On a team, each man has to do what he does best."

Still reluctant, but pleased with the tribute to his athletic prowess, Pete obeyed. He slipped quietly out of the cave, and began to run at a steady pace towards The Crooked-Y ranch house.

Inside the cave, Jupiter, Bob and Sam Reston walked quickly through the tunnels until they stood in front of Old Ben's secret cavern. Reston moved the boulder, and stepped into the cavern.

The little room was empty. But in the far wall, they

found Old Ben and Waldo's exit tunnel. It was another man-made mine shaft, and it angled sharply upward. With Sam Reston in the lead, his pistol ready, they started through the tunnel. Jupiter marked another trail of chalk question marks.

"We're heading towards the north ridge of the mountain," Bob said as they advanced. "That's where the book says Old Ben and Waldo have their cabin."

"That is to be expected, Bob," Jupiter observed. "They opened an old mine shaft close to their cabin so there would be less chance of being observed."

Reston suddenly stopped. Ahead, the shaft ended in a wall of rocks. Bob noticed footprints on the ground that seemed to go straight into the wall of stones. Reston bent close. He leaned against a boulder and moved it out of the way. Then he moved two more large stones until there was a small passage.

The detective crawled into the passage. For a moment his feet were visible to the boys, and then they vanished. Bob and Jupiter peered into the hole, then quickly scrambled through.

They stood in the clear night behind a thick cover of trees and bushes on the north ridge of Devil Mountain.

"No one would notice a hole that small in the mountain," Reston observed. "Come on, boys, but stay behind me."

The detective advanced cautiously along the ridge between the valley and the sea. In a minute they saw a gleam of light in the window of a small cabin. They crept quietly up to the window and looked in. Old Ben and Waldo sat at a bare table, a pile of small stones between them!

Jupiter Guesses Right

His pistol in his hand, Sam Reston opened the door of the cabin.

"Claim jumpers!" cried Old Ben in his high, cracked voice. "Get 'em, Waldo!"

Sam Reston levelled his pistol. "Just sit where you are, Waldo."

The tall old prospector was half out of his chair. He slowly sat down again.

"The maverick's got the drop on us, Ben," Waldo said.

"We gonna let him get away with claim robbing?" Old Ben demanded.

"No one fights fair no more, Ben," Waldo complained.

The two old men glared furiously at Reston. Then Old Ben's wild red eyes fixed on Bob and Jupiter.

"Those boys!" he cried. "I told you they was fixin' to cause trouble, Waldo! We should have taken care of them!"

"I guess you were right," Waldo agreed.

Old Ben waved his arms wildly. "You mavericks can't get away with this, you hear? Always get claim jumpers, yessir. Hang 'em high, that's what we do!"

"The mine's ours," Waldo insisted, touching the small pile of rough diamonds on the table.

"Is that why you had to sneak into the cave?" Reston demanded. "Is that why you dug at night and closed that cavern every time anyone came?"

Old Ben's eyes grew cunning. "A rich strike, yessir. Got to keep it quiet. Word get out, we got a stampede on our hand. No sir, we keep it quiet."

Bob said hotly, "You wanted it quiet because this land belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Dalton! The diamonds are theirs!"

"We been prospecting that cave almost twenty years," Waldo protested. "We found the diamonds. We dug 'em out. They belong to us, you hear me, boy?"

All this time Jupiter had said nothing. He was looking intently around the cabin. He was intrigued to see that it contained a radio, a bookcase full of books, and stacks of newspapers. He picked up one of the newspapers and studied it.

Old Ben's red-rimmed eyes grew even more shrewd.

"Tell you what, there's enough for everyone, right?" he said in his high voice. "Sure, plenty to go around. Now, we're not so greedy. Tell you what, we'll split with you, eh? A quarter of these stones here, and you can dig with us in the mine, eh? Lots more stones in there. A bonanza!"

Suddenly Jupiter spoke up. "There are no more stones, Mr. Jackson, or only a few, and you are quite aware of that."

Everyone turned to stare at Jupiter.

"This cabin is not entirely consistent with your pose as two eccentric old prospectors living in the past," Jupiter went on.

"Gosh, Jupe, what do you mean?" Bob exclaimed.

"He means these old codgers are partial fakes," Sam Reston said, "which I suspect is true. But how did you reach that conclusion, Jupiter?"

Jupiter pointed to the radio. "A portable radio scarcely fits in with the picture of two crazy old men with nothing on their minds but the past. And the books in this bookcase indicate an alertness and interest in the modern world they aren't supposed to



"Sit where you are, Waldo," said Mr. Reston.

have. I would say they have found the people in the area a soft touch, contributing to their grubstake without asking any questions. And I am also certain that they were aware that they had not found a diamond mine."

"How do you figure that, Jupiter?" Reston asked.

Jupe indicated the bookcase. "Four of the books in that bookcase are about diamonds, and all four are quite new. In addition, this newspaper contains a full account of the San Francisco diamond robbery from the museum. It is dated a year ago, and the story is circled in pencil. It's a San Francisco paper, so they must have obtained it specially."

"So!" Reston turned to the two old men. "What do you have to say to that?"

Old Ben and Waldo looked at each other. Finally Old Ben shrugged. When he spoke this time his voice did not sound at all eccentric.

"The boy's right," Old Ben said simply. "We knew it wasn't a diamond mine. No diamonds around here."

"We thought maybe it was a strike when we found the first couple," Waldo added, "only we really knew better, so Ben got those books. The diamonds turned out to be mostly African types. Then I went to the library and found a small piece in the local paper about that robbery. We got a copy of the San Francisco paper, and it described the stones, so we knew they were from the robbery."

Old Ben took up the story. "The diamonds were stolen, so we figured we could keep them. No one except the crook was going to know. We started to dig and found a real bonanza!"

"Only the holes we opened up made the cave start to moan again," Waldo went on. "At first we figured that was fine, it scared folks away from the cave.

Then Mr. Dalton and the sheriff started looking around. So I went up on the mountain and any time anyone came near the cave I signalled Ben and he closed up the holes until they went away."

Old Ben chuckled. "We sure had everyone fooled. I scared you boys off once myself, only I don't figure how you got into the cave to-night without Waldo seeing you."

Jupiter explained the ruse of Bob and the dummies, and the two old men listened with admiration. Old Ben chuckled when Jupe finished.

"By jinkers, I said you boys was smart, yessir. You had it figured, and you foxed us pretty good."

Reston spoke sternly. "This is not a laughing matter, Mr. Jackson. Keeping stolen property is a serious crime."

Ben grinned sheepishly. "I don't know if we'd really have kept them. Only we'd never made a real strike, and it was kind of exciting to dig them up. For a while we felt like real prospectors again. I guess it wasn't right, only we figured no one would be hurt except the thief. At least not until we decided what to do with the stones."

"What about those accidents?" Bob asked hotly. "And the rock that almost hit us?"

"Most of them were real accidents," Waldo explained. "They happen around here all the time. People got nervous from the moaning and that made them more careless. The one that almost hit you was my fault, though. I was watching you and my foot knocked over a stone and the boulder fell. I never meant to hurt anyone."

Sam Reston looked at the two men severely. "I'll decide what to do about you two later," he said, gathering up the diamonds and putting them back

into the leather bag. The two old men watched wisely as their rich strike vanished.

"You've acted foolishly," added Reston, "but you did recover the diamonds. Maybe you meant to return them eventually, who knows? Just now I have a thief to find."

Jupiter spoke up again. "I've been thinking about Schmidt, Mr. Reston. I'm positive he knows Old Ben and Waldo have been digging in the cave, and he must know they have found his diamonds. I'm sure he will be back to get them, which leads me to think you set a trap for him."

The muffled voice spoke from close behind them all.

"You are a smart boy. I did return!"

Everyone jumped, and turned towards the voice. There in the doorway stood the fake El Diablo! His masked face was as young and rigid as when he had captured Jupiter and Pete in the cave, and his left hand held the same pistol aimed at them all.

"Don't move, boys," Reston said quietly. "If this is Schmidt, he is a dangerous man." The detective was eyeing his own pistol, which he had left on the table.

"Very wise advice," the muffled voice rasped. "And it is indeed Schmidt." The thief waved his pistol to indicate they were to move against the wall. "Don't try for that pistol, Reston."

Reston, the boys, and the two old men stood against the wall.

"You, the small boy, take that rope in the corner and tie up Reston. Quick!"

"Do it, Bob," Reston said.

Swallowing hard, Bob got the rope and tied Reston's hands and feet. Schmidt motioned him away and in-

spected Reston's bonds. Satisfied, the bandit stepped back.

"Now you boys tie the old men," the bandit ordered.

Jupiter and Bob tied Old Ben and Waldo. Then Bob tied Jupiter, and Schmidt himself tied up Bob. When they were all trussed up on the floor, the bandit stepped to the table and picked up the leather bag. His voice rasped mockingly.

"I must thank you for having the diamonds ready for me. You saved me all the trouble of digging them out after the earthquake. I've been watching them quite carefully, of course. I did not go to the trouble of stealing them to lose them that easily." The bandit chuckled. "You boys were a bit stubborn and troublesome, but when I saw those scuba tanks I guessed what you were up to. I was a trifle nervous when I realized Reston was close behind me again, but it has all turned out fine."

The jewel thief bowed mockingly to his trussed victims, and vanished from the cabin.

Jupiter groaned. "I should have guessed he would be watching us! When he captured us in the cave it was obvious he knew about the digging—we could hear it from where he caught us."

"Don't blame yourself, Jupiter," Reston said. "You solved the entire case correctly. I should have realized myself that Schmidt was only using Old Ben and Waldo."

"Well," Bob said, "at least Juve guessed right. The thief did return."

Jupiter frowned, unsatisfied. "What good is solving a mystery if you can't even see the villain's face?" he asked. "He'll get away, and we'll never know what he looks like. And Mr. Reston will have to start all over——"

Jupiter stopped in mid-sentence, his mouth open like a startled fish. He sat staring ahead as if in some kind of trance.

"Jupe?" Bob said.

"Jupiter," Sam Reston said, "what is it?"

Jupiter blinked as if he had just come back into the room from a long trip. "We've got to get loose!" he cried, straining at his bonds. "We've got to hurry and go after him!"

Sam Reston shook his head gloomily. "He's long gone by now, Jupiter. He wouldn't stay around."

"I don't know," Jupiter said.

"You don't know what, Jupe?" asked Bob.

The sudden sound of horses' hoofs outside the cabin prevented Jupiter's reply. A moment later the outside door burst open, and a big man they had never seen before glared down at the five bound prisoners.

"What the devil is going on in here?" he boomed. "You boys should know better."

Bob and Jupe looked up at the big man, and then grinned with relief.

Behind him they saw the familiar and friendly faces of Pete and Mrs. Dalton.

18

El Diablo Unmasked

THE big man proved to be the sheriff of Santa Carla County, and at first he was very angry with the boys for trying to solve the mystery alone.

"Three boys have no business chasing a dangerous jewel thief!" the sheriff thundered.

"Anything might have happened in that cave,"

added Mrs. Dalton, "with all kinds of thieves and crazy men walking around! If Pete hadn't spotted those question marks and realized you might have gone to Old Ben's cabin, goodness knows how we would have found you!"

Bob looked a little bit sheepish, but Jupiter turned quickly to the sheriff. "We're sorry, sir," he said politely, "but we did nothing really dangerous in the cave. We were most unfortunately captured by the thief Mr. Reston is pursuing."

Reston broke in. "That's right, Sheriff. The boys had no way of knowing that there was a dangerous criminal in the cave. They thought they were merely solving the mystery of the moaning, and perhaps of a couple of eccentric but harmless old men. They had no idea of capturing a jewel thief until I came along. It was my idea to go after Old Ben and Waldo."

"And that's something I want to talk to you about later," the sheriff growled at Reston. "But maybe you're right. I guess the boys acted pretty responsibly all in all."

"I'd say more responsibly than most adults," Reston said. "And they seemed to have solved our mystery, even if the thief did get away."

Mrs. Dalton smiled. "I'd say they have turned out to be pretty good investigators."

"They did solve the case at that," the sheriff went on. "It's too bad the thief got away, but we'll nab him yet."

"Please, sir!" Jupiter cried.

Everyone stared at the First Investigator in surprise.

"I'm not sure the thief *has* got away yet," Jupiter insisted eagerly, "or that he's even trying to."

"What do you mean, son?" asked the sheriff.

"Can you tell me where everyone else is, sir?" Jupiter asked quietly.

"Everyone else? You mean the people from the ranch? Why, they're all out looking for you boys," the sheriff said. "Dalton and his men are down on the beach, and Luke Hardin and Professor Walsh are with some other men on the far side of Devil Mountain."

"Where were you going to meet later?" Jupiter asked.

"At the ranch house," replied the sheriff.

"Then I suggest we all go to the ranch house quickly," Jupiter said firmly.

The sheriff frowned. "Now see here, boy, if you have anything on your mind you better tell us."

Jupiter shook his head. "There isn't time, sir. It would take too long to explain, and we must catch him before he can dispose of the evidence."

"Better listen to the boy, Sheriff," Sam Reston advised. "I've learned from experience that he knows what he's talking about."

"All right then," the sheriff agreed. "Come on, boys, you can ride with us."

Jupiter got up behind the sheriff on his horse, and Bob and Pete rode with two deputies who had been waiting outside on horseback. It was a wild ride across the rugged terrain. The boys hung on desperately, as they jounced and swayed along, unable to see where they were going.

But when they reached the house they saw no sign of life. There was only a dim light in the kitchen window.

"Well, son," the sheriff said to Jupiter, who clung behind him, "who did you expect to find here?"

Jupiter bit his lip in the dark. "I'm sure he will come back. We must have beaten him here. He has

to pretend to search for us for a while, at least. I suggest we all dismount and wait in the dark."

"We'll dismount all right," the sheriff agreed, "but I want to know what this is all about."

The sheriff swung down, and helped Jupiter to the ground. A moment later Sam Reston pulled up in his car.

"Now, son," the sheriff said firmly, "you tell me what this wild goose chase is about."

"Well, sir," Jupiter explained, "I remembered some things the bandit said to us when we were in the cabin. I put them together with some facts, and . . ."

A man suddenly came limping towards them from the side of the ranch house.

"Well, I see you located them, Sheriff," Professor Walsh said. "Good work. You boys had quite a busy night, eh?"

The professor smiled from behind his thick glasses, and touched his left leg. "Took a spill, I'm afraid. Had to come back and bandage up a nasty cut on my leg."

"You're just in time, Professor," the sheriff said. "Young Jones here is about to tell us a story."

Jupiter's voice was calm. "That won't be necessary now, Sheriff. I suggest you search Professor Walsh for the diamonds. I don't believe he would have abandoned them again, especially since he is sure we won't suspect that he is really Laslo Schmidt."

"Schmidt!" Sam Reston cried, staring at the professor.

"I think the diamonds will be under the bandage," Jupiter added.

With a cry, Professor Walsh turned and ran. In a second everyone was in pursuit. All except the boys and Mrs. Dalton. They turned and stared at Jupiter.

The First Investigator just stood there and grinned.

Alfred Hitchcock Hears a Story

"So, young Master Jones, the diamonds were indeed found under the bandage on Professor Walsh's leg?" Alfred Hitchcock asked.

"Yes, sir," Jupiter said. "They captured the professor just as he reached his car, the one with the Nevada licence. It turned out that he had two cars. The one with the Nevada licence he kept hidden in a concealed gully in Moaning Valley. The El Diablo costume and rubber mask were in the car. He had not disposed of them because he was confident that no one had guessed he was Laslo Schmidt."

"Ah, the over-confidence of the master criminal," the famous director observed solemnly. "Well done, lads."

It was a week after the capture of Professor Walsh, Schmidt. The boys had just returned home a well-earned week's vacation on The Crooked-Y swimming, riding and learning about ranch

Now they sat in the office of the famous motion picture director and reported on *The Mystery of the Moaning Cave* from Bob's notes.

"I believe I understand the secret of the cave's moaning," Mr. Hitchcock continued, "and the activities of Old Ben and Waldo. Incidentally, what happened to those two old rascals in the end?"

Bob grinned. "The sheriff finally decided that they hadn't really had a chance to be guilty of any wrongdoing. He preferred to believe that they would eventually have had sense enough to turn in the diamonds."

Mr. and Mrs. Dalton even forgave them for scaring everyone."

Mr. Hitchcock nodded behind his big desk. "I see. Yes, I suppose they were merely carried away by the dreams of a rich strike."

"Then you'll introduce our report on this case, sir?" Pete put in eagerly.

"Wait!" Mr. Hitchcock thundered. "I have not said that. I have agreed to introduce any of your adventures that are worthy of my attention, and to help understand the matters of the moaning and the groaning of the prospectors. However, I have not yet learned how young Jones came to his sudden conclusion that El Diablo and Professor Walsh were really Laslo Schmidt."

Jupiter leaned forward in his chair. "Well, sir, I began to wonder about Professor Walsh possibly being the false El Diablo. Then it became clear that he was the most logical person to be Laslo Schmidt. He was the only real stranger at The Crooked-Y, and his past history was the most easily falsified."

Mr. Hitchcock nodded. "I see that. He was in the area only for a year, and it is easier to pretend to be a professor than an ex-rodeo rider or a ranch foreman. But what led you to consider him at all?"

Jupiter frowned. "Actually, sir, I should have considered him sooner. But I admit it did not strike me until we were all captured in Old Ben's cabin. It was what he said after he tied us up that revealed it all to me."

Mr. Hitchcock leafed through Bob's notes. "He doesn't appear to have said much," the director finally observed.

"Not much, but enough," said Jupiter. "First, he mentioned having seen our scuba tanks. Only one at the ranch could have seen those tanks. Second,

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"Not much, but enough," said Jupiter. "First, he mentioned having seen our scuba tanks. Only someone at the ranch could have seen those tanks. Second,

there was his voice. Although it was muffled and disguised so that we could not recognize it by its sound, he could not disguise his pattern of speech. And when I thought about my other clues, I suddenly realized the pattern was obviously that of Professor Walsh."

Mr. Hitchcock's eyes sparkled. "I see. Yes, the speech pattern of a person can be a real give-away."

"Then," Jupiter went on, "he said that he became nervous when he realized that Reston was close behind him again. That gave me two clues. First, that the false El Diablo knew who Mr. Reston was, and second that he knew that Mr. Reston was getting close to him!"

"Of course!" Mr. Hitchcock exclaimed. "Reston had told you that Laslo Schmidt knew him by sight. And no one had seen Reston except you boys. You described Reston to the others. So it was clear that your false El Diablo was a man who had recognized Reston from your description, even with the addition of the eye patch and the scar."

"Exactly, sir," Jupiter agreed.

Mr. Hitchcock frowned. "However, all that is more circumstantial, young man. It fits Professor Walsh, but it also fits others at the ranch. What was it that made you narrow your deductions to Walsh?"

"The pistol he carried, sir," Jupiter said triumphantly.

"The pistol?" the director repeated, staring at Bob's notes. "I see nothing here about the pistol—nothing special, that is."

"No, sir, not the weapon itself, but the way he held it," Jupiter said quickly. "You see, the El Diablo who captured us held the pistol in his left hand. I wore his holster on his left hip. But all the books and pictures indicated that El Diablo was right-handed."

when we found the skeleton of the real El Diablo in the cave it had the pistol in its right hand, too. So——"

"Thunderation!" Mr. Hitchcock exclaimed. "How could I have overlooked that! Of course, young Jones, only the professor had the theory that El Diablo was left-handed! He was tripped up by his own pet theory!"

"Yes, sir, he was," Jupiter said with a grin. "You see, he really was a professor, too, as well as a thief. As Mr. Reston said, he had spent five years establishing another identity. He really was Professor Walsh, and he really was an expert on California history. He was actually writing a book about El Diablo, and when he impersonated the bandit he automatically conformed to his own theory and acted left-handed!"

Mr. Hitchcock laughed uproariously. "You boys have done more than well, young Jones. This may be your most ingeniously deduced case, and I will be glad to introduce it. His left hand, by thunder!"

The boys all beamed happily at this high praise. Then Jupiter held out the old pistol that he and Pete had found in the hands of the real El Diablo.

"We thought, sir, that you might like to have this as a memento of *The Mystery of the Moaning Cave*," he said.

"Ah, the pistol of the real El Diablo." Mr. Hitchcock looked at the old gun with awe. "I most certainly will treasure it. Actually, you young sleuths did more than explain the moaning and solve the diamond robbery. You finally provided an ending for the legend of El Diablo."

"Golly!" Pete exclaimed. "We did, didn't we?" "There remains only one problem," Mr. Hitchcock said, and his eyes twinkled. "Is there actually an Old

One in that pool in the cave? Might *it* have killed El Diablo?"

Jupiter became thoughtful again. He stared into the distance.

"Well, sir, the legend of The Old One has been passed down for a long time. Possibly there is a true basis for it. It might be interesting to return to the cave and see if there is anything in that pool."

"Oh, no!" groaned Bob and Pete together.

But all Jupiter said then was, "HMMMMMM . . . I wonder."

The three boys filed out of the office, and Alfred Hitchcock looked at the pistol on his desk and smiled. Once again The Three Investigators had explained a mystery that had baffled adults. He wondered what riddle would involve them next. Perhaps it would be The Old One in the cave.

If not, it would be something equally mysterious, he was sure.

said. "Every new experience helps broaden our background as investigators. I'll see if Uncle Titus will let Hans drive us up to Hollywood in the light truck."

Hans, one of two Bavarian brothers who helped in the salvage yard, was free. And so, an hour later, the boys were standing in a large room crowded with people, watching a short, plump auctioneer on a raised platform auction off trunks and suitcases as rapidly as possible. At the moment he had a new-looking suitcase in front of him and was trying to get one more bid on it.

"Going once! Going once!" he shouted. "Going twice! Going twice! . . . Gone! Sold for twelve dollars and fifty cents to the gentleman with the red necktie."

The auctioneer banged his gavel, signifying that the sale was final. Then he turned to see what came next.

"Now we come to lot 98!" he sang out. "A very interesting item, ladies and gentlemen. Interesting and unusual. Hoist it up where everyone can see it, boys."

Two sturdy workmen lifted a small, old-fashioned trunk on to the platform. Pete stirred restlessly. It was a hot day and the room was stuffy. Some of the men present seemed quite interested in bidding on the unknown contents of the luggage, but Pete couldn't have cared less.

"C'mon, Jupe, let's go!" Pete muttered to his stocky companion.

"Just a little longer," Jupiter whispered back. "This looks like an interesting item. I think I'll bid on it."

"On that?" Pete stared at the trunk. "You're crazy."

"Just the same, I think I'll try to buy it. If it's worth anything, we'll all share."

"Worth anything? It's probably full of clothes that went out of style in 1890," Bob said.

The trunk indeed looked old. It was made of wood, with leather straps and leather binding, and had a rounded top. It looked stoutly locked.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the auctioneer shouted "I invite your attention to this fine trunk. Believe me, folks, they don't make trunks like this one any more!"

A snicker went through the crowd. It was certainly true no one made trunks like that any more. The trunk could easily have been fifty years old.

"I think it's an old actor's trunk," Jupe whispered to his two companions. "The kind actors touring in plays used to take with them to keep their costumes in."

"One thing we don't need is a bunch of old costumes," Pete muttered back. "For goodness sake, Jupe—"

But the auctioneer was already shouting his sales talk.

"Look at it, ladies and gentlemen, look at it!" he cried. "Not new, not modern, no indeed. But think of it as an antique. Think of it as a fond memento of grandfather's day. And what may be in it?"

He rapped the trunk with his knuckles. It gave off a dull thud.

"Who knows what it holds? It might hold anything. Why, folks, the crown jewels of the former czars of old Russia might be in that trunk. I don't guarantee it, but certainly the possibility can't be denied. Now what am I bid? Give me an offer, someone. Give me an offer."

The crowd was silent. Apparently no one wanted it. The auctioneer looked annoyed.

"Come on, folks!" he implored. "Give me a bid. I've started. This fine old antique trunk, this—
—yesterday, this—"

"Take it back to the salvage yard and open it," Jupe said, grasping the leather handle at the other end.

"Wait a minute, fellows," the second workman said. "First it has to be paid for. Mustn't forget that important detail."

"Oh, that's right." Jupe put down his end, reached in his pocket for a leather wallet, took out a dollar bill, and handed it to the man. The man scribbled on a paper and gave it to Jupe.

"Your receipt," he said. "Now it's yours. If there're any royal jewels in it, you own them. Haw haw!" Still laughing, he let the boys take the trunk. With Bob ahead of them, pushing a way through the crowd, Jupe and Pete carried the small trunk towards the rear of the room. They had just got it through the rows of people when the white-haired woman who had come too late to bid bustled up to them.

"Boys," she said, "I'll buy that trunk from you for twenty-five dollars. I collect old trunks and I want this one for my collection."

"Gosh, twenty-five dollars!" Pete exclaimed.

"Take it, Jupel!" Bob said.

"It's a very good profit—and the trunk isn't really worth a cent more even to a collector," the woman said. "Here you are, twenty-five dollars."

She took the money from a large pocketbook and thrust it at Jupiter. To the amazement of Bob and Pete, Jupiter shook his head.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said. "We don't want to sell it. We want to see what's in it."

"There can't be anything in it of value," the woman said, looking upset. "Here, I'll give you thirty dollars."

"No, thank you." Jupiter shook his head again. "I really don't want to sell it."

The woman sighed. Then, just as she was about to



e white-haired woman rushed up to the boys.

say something more, she seemed to take alarm. She turned and scurried away, losing herself in the crowd. She had apparently been frightened by the approach of a young man carrying a camera.

"Hi, boys," the young man said. "I'm Fred Brown. I'm a reporter for *The Hollywood News*, and I'm looking for a human interest story. I'd like to take your picture with the trunk. It's the only thing at all unusual in the sale. Just lift it up, will you? That's fine. And you—" he spoke to Bob—"stand behind it so you'll be in the picture."

Bob and Pete looked uncertain, but Jupe quickly motioned them into the pose the reporter wanted. Standing behind the trunk, Bob noticed that across the top were stencilled in faded white paint the words, THE GREAT GULLIVER. The young man aimed the camera, a flashbulb went off, and the picture was taken.

"Thanks," the reporter said. "Now may I have your names? And will you tell me why you refused thirty dollars for it? Seems like a nice profit to me."

"We're just curious," Jupiter said. "I think it's an old theatrical trunk and we want to see what's in it. We just bought it for fun, not to make a profit."

"Then you don't believe it has the Russian crown jewels in it?" Fred Brown chuckled.

"That's just talk," Pete said. "It might have old costumes in it."

"Could be," the young man agreed. "That name, The Great Gulliver, sounds very theatrical. Speaking of names, what did you say yours were?"

"We didn't say," Jupiter answered. "But here's our card. We're—uh—well, we investigate things."

He handed the reporter one of The Three Investigators' business cards which the boys carried at all times. It said:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

"We Investigate Anything"

? ? ?

First Investigator — JUPITER JONES

Second Investigator — PETER CRENSHAW

Records and Research — BOB ANDREWS

"So?" The reporter raised his eyebrows. "You're investigators, eh? What do the question marks stand for?"

"That's our symbol," Jupiter told him. "The question marks stand for mysteries unsolved, riddles unanswered, puzzles of any kind. So we use it as our trademark. We investigate any kind of mystery."

"And now you're investigating an old theatrical trunk." The young man smiled and put the card in his pocket. "Thanks a lot. Maybe you'll see your picture in tonight's paper. Depends on whether the editor likes the story or not."

He raised his hand in a gesture of good-bye and turned away. Jupe picked up his end of the trunk again.

"Come on, Pete, we have to get this outside," he said. "We can't keep Hans waiting any longer."

With Bob leading the way, he and Pete lugged the trunk towards the street exit. Pete was still grumbling.

"Why did you tell that fellow our names?" he said.

"Publicity," Jupiter said. "Every business needs publicity for people to know about it. Lately good mysteries have been scarce, and we can use it or we'll get rusty."

They went through a big door, out on to the pavement, and down the street a few yards to where the light truck was parked. After heaving the trunk into the back, the boys climbed into the cab of the truck with Hans.

"Back home, Hans," Jupiter said. "We have made a purchase and we wish to examine it."

"Sure, Jupe," Hans agreed, getting the truck started. "You buy something, huh?"

"An old trunk," Pete said. "How're we going to open it, First?"

"We have lots of keys around the salvage yard," Jupiter told him. "If we're lucky one of them will work."

"Maybe we'll have to break it open," Bob suggested.

"No." Jupiter shook his head. "That would spoil it. We'll get the lock open somehow."

They rode the rest of the way in silence. When they reached The Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach, Pete and Jupe handed down the trunk to Hans, who set it to one side. Mrs Jones came out of the little cabin that served as an office.

"Mercy and goodness, what have you bought?" she

"Why, that trunk looks old enough to have been over on the *Mayflower*."

"Quite, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said. "But it's new. We paid a dollar for it."

"Well, at least you didn't waste much money on it," said his aunt. "I suppose you need the bunch of keys to try to open it. They're on a nail over the desk."

Bob ran in to get the keys. Jupe began trying all the ones that seemed the right size. After about half an hour he gave up. None of the keys would open the trunk.

"Now what'll we do?" Pete asked.

"Pry it open?" Bob suggested.

"Not yet," Jupe told them. "I believe Uncle Titus has more keys put away somewhere. We'll have to wait until he comes back and ask him for them."

Jupiter's aunt came out of the office again.

"Well, boys," she said briskly, "can't waste all day. Time to get to work. First lunch, then work. You'll have to let the old trunk wait."

Reluctantly the boys went for lunch in the neat, two-storey house just outside the salvage yard where Jupiter lived with his Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus. Then they set to work mending and repairing broken articles in the salvage yard. Titus Jones would later sell these, giving them part of the profit for spending money. This kept them well-occupied until late in the afternoon, when Titus Jones and Konrad, the other yard helper, came lumbering into the yard in the big truck, bearing a load of junk Mr Jones had bought that day.

Titus Jones, a small man with a large nose and an enormous black moustache, hopped down as lightly as a boy and embraced his wife. Then he waved a newspaper he held in his hand.

"Gather round, boys!" he called. "You're in the newspaper."

Curiously the three boys joined him and his wife, and Titus Jones spread out *The Hollywood News* to show them the first page of the second section. There, sure enough, was their picture—Jupe and Pete holding the old trunk, Bob standing behind it. It was a good picture—even the name THE GREAT GULLIVER was clear on the trunk. A headline said YOUNG SLEUTHS TO INVESTIGATE MYSTERY TRUNK. The story below it told, in a humorous manner, of Jupiter's buying the trunk and refusing to sell it for a profit, and I

to find something very mysterious or valuable inside it. Of course, this last was just the reporter's imagination, thrown in to make the story more entertaining. The boys had no idea what they'd find inside the trunk.

The story also gave their names and said their Headquarters was in The Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach.

"Well, that's publicity, all right," Pete said. "It makes us sound kind of foolish, though, thinking there's something valuable in the trunk."

"That was because the auctioneer talked about the Russian crown jewels," Jupiter said. "We'll have to cut this out and add it to our scrapbook."

"Later," Mrs Jones said firmly. "It's dinner-time now. Put the trunk away and wash your hands. Bob, Pete, are you going to eat with us tonight?"

Bob and Pete ate at Jupiter's home about as often as they did at their own. But this time they thought they'd better get on home, so they pedalled off on their bicycles. Jupiter pushed the old trunk out of the way round the corner of the office and went in to dinner. Mr Jones came along behind and locked the big iron front gates of the salvage yard—fancy, ornamental gates bought from an estate that had burned down. The rest of the evening was uneventful, until just as Jupiter was going up to bed there came a soft knocking on the door. It was Hans and Konrad, who lived in a small house at the back.

"Just want to tell you, Mr Jones," Hans said softly. "We see a light in the salvage yard, we look through the fence, somebody is fooling around in there. Maybe we all better see, huh?"

"Mercy and goodness and sweetness and light! Thieves!" Mrs Jones gasped.

"We'll take a look, Mathilda, my dear," said Mr

Jones. "With Hans and Konrad, we can handle any burglar. We'll slip up on the intruders and catch them by surprise."

He and the two husky yard helpers began to move cautiously towards the front gates of the salvage yard. Jupiter tagged along behind. No one had suggested he come, but on the other hand, no one had said he couldn't.

Now, through the cracks in the board fence surrounding the yard, they could see flickers of light from a flashlight inside. They tiptoed forward. Then—disaster! Hans tripped over something, fell heavily to the ground, and let out a surprised "Oof!"

Whoever was inside the yard heard him. Immediately they heard the sound of running feet. Two dark figures ran out through the front gate, leaped into a car parked across the street, and roared away.

Mr Jones, Konrad, and Jupiter ran up swiftly. The front gate stood open, the lock obviously picked. The thieves were gone. But Jupiter, with a sudden suspicion, ran to where he had left the old trunk he had bought.

The mystery trunk was gone!

An Unusual Visitor

BOB ANDREWS rode his bicycle through the front gate of The Jones Salvage Yard. It was a bright, sunny morning in late summer and the day promised to be warm. Pete and Jupiter were already busy in the yard. Pete was taking apart a rusty power mower, and Jupiter was putting a coat of white enamel on some iron garden chairs from which he had sanded the rust.

They looked up, dejected, as Bob parked his bike and walked over.

"Hello, Bob," Jupiter said. "Take a brush and get busy. We have a lot of these chairs to paint."

"Did you get the trunk open?" Bob burst out. "What was inside it?"

"The trunk?" Pete laughed hollowly. "What trunk are you talking about, Bob?"

"You know what trunk," Bob said, puzzled. "The . . . Jupe bought yesterday at the auction. My mum thought the picture of the three of us was pretty good. He's curious about the trunk, too."

"Everyone seems to be curious about that trunk," Jupiter said, dabbing on more paint. "Too curious. We could have sold it and made a profit while we were at it."

"What *are* you talking about?" Bob demanded.

"He means there isn't any trunk," Pete said. "Not any more. It was stolen last night."

"Stolen!" Bob stared at him. "Who stole it?"

"We don't know," Jupiter said and then told Bob

about the disturbance of the night before. "Two men ran off and got away," Jupiter finished. "And the trunk was gone. Obviously they stole it."

"Golly, I wonder why they wanted it!" Bob exclaimed. "What do you suppose was in it?"

"Maybe they were just curious, too," Pete suggested. "They read the story in the paper and they came to have a look."

"I don't think so." Jupiter shook his head. "No one would steal a dollar trunk just out of curiosity. Too much risk. They must have had a good idea something valuable was in it. I'm beginning to think that trunk would have been worth investigating. Too bad we don't have it any more."

The boys' talk was interrupted by the arrival of an expensive blue car. A tall, thin man with strangely slanting eyebrows got out and came towards them.

"Ah, good morning," he said. He looked at Jupiter. "Jupiter Jones, I believe."

"Yes, sir," Jupiter said. "Can I help you? My aunt and uncle are away for a little while, but if there's anything in the salvage yard you're interested in, I can sell it to you."

"I am interested in only one thing," the tall man said. "Yesterday, according to information in the local press, you bought an old trunk. At an auction. For the large sum of one dollar. Are the facts as I state them correct?"

"Yes, sir," Jupiter answered, staring at him. Both his appearance and manner of speaking were certainly a little odd. "That's true."

"Very good," the tall man said. "To waste no more time in conversation, I wish to buy the trunk from you. I hope, I do hope, you haven't sold it yet?"

"Well, no sir," Jupe admitted. "I haven't sold it. But—"

"Then all is well," the stranger said. He waved his hand, and a number of green bills appeared between his fingers, spread out like a fan.

"Look," he said. "One hundred dollars. Ten ten-dollar bills. I offer to you for the trunk." As Jupiter hesitated, he went on, "Surely that is enough? You cannot expect me to pay more for one old-fashioned trunk containing nothing but odds and ends, can you?"

"No, sir," Jupiter began again. "But—"

"There is no need to keep saying but!" the man snapped. "I am offering you a fair price. I want the trunk for sentimental reasons. The story in the newspaper said it had once belonged to The Great Gulliver. Is that correct?"

"Well," Jupe answered as Bob and Pete watched in puzzled interest, "that name was on it. But—"

"But again!" The tall man scowled. "'But me no butts!' Shakespeare said that and I say it. The fact is, The Great Gulliver was once a friend of mine. I have not seen him for some years. I fear, alas, that he is no more. Departed. Gone. To put it bluntly, dead. I should like to own his trunk for old times' sake. Here is my card."

He snapped his fingers. The money in his hand changed to a small white card. He extended it to Jupiter, who took it. The card said *Maximilian the Mystic*. A line below that said he lived at the Sorcerer's Club, at an address in Hollywood.

"You're a magician!" Jupiter exclaimed. Maximilian the Mystic gave a slight bow.

"Once well known," he answered. "Performances before all the crowned heads of Europe. Now in retirement, devoting myself to writing a history of magic. An occasional small exhibition of my skills for friends. But back to business."

He snapped his fingers and again the money was in his hands.

"Let us complete our transaction," he said. "I have the money. I wish the trunk. You are in business to buy and sell. It is as simple as that. You sell, I buy. Why do you hesitate?"

"Because I can't sell you the trunk!" Jupiter burst out. "That's what I've been trying to tell you."

"Can't?" The slanting eyebrows of the magician drew close together. His scowl was black. "Of course you can. Do not make me angry, boy. I still have mystic powers. Suppose—" he thrust his head toward Jupiter and his dark eyes gleamed—"suppose I snapped my fingers and made you vanish? Pouf! Like that. Into thin air. Never to return. Then you might be sorry you had made me angry."

Mr Maximilian sounded so ominous that both Bob and Pete gulped. Even Jupe looked uneasy.

"I can't sell you the trunk," he said, "because I haven't got it. It was stolen last night."

"Stolen! Is this the truth, boy?"

"Yes, sir." Jupiter proceeded to relate, for the third time that morning, the events of the night before. Maximilian listened intently. Then he sighed.

"Alas!" he said. "I should have come the moment I read the newspaper. You have no clue to the thieves?"

"They got away before we could get close to them," Jupe said.

"Bad, very bad," the magician muttered. "To think that the trunk of The Great Gulliver should reappear so strangely, only to vanish again. I wonder why they wanted it."

"Maybe there is something valuable in it after all," Bob suggested.

"Nonsense!" Maximilian said. "

Mystery upon Mystery

"A TALKING SKULL?" the boys exclaimed together. Fred Brown nodded.

"That's right. A genuine talking skull. Did you find it?"

Jupiter had to admit they hadn't found anything in the trunk because it had been stolen. Again he told the story. The reporter frowned.

"Darn!" he said. "There goes my feature! I wonder who took it? Somebody who read the story in the newspaper, I suppose."

"I suppose so, Mr Brown," Jupiter agreed. "Maybe somebody else knew about that talking skull and wanted it. Was it a skull that really talks?"

"Call me Fred," the reporter said. "I can't tell you if the skull really talked or not. I just know it was supposed to. You see, I began thinking about that name on the trunk—The Great Gulliver. I was sure I'd heard it before. So I looked it up in the morgue—you know what a newspaper morgue is?"

They nodded. Bob's father was a newspaper man, so they knew that a newspaper morgue is a room where old news stories, clippings, and pictures are kept on file to be used for research. It is actually a library of facts about people and events.

"Well," Fred Brown went on, "I decided to look up The Great Gulliver. Sure enough, there were several stories about him. It seems that though he wasn't very much of a magician, he had one special trick. He had a talking skull.

"A year ago Gulliver just vanished. Into thin air, like one of his tricks. Nobody knows if he died or what. But apparently he left his trunk behind at the hotel, and it came up for auction yesterday and you bought it. I figured that he probably had his magic apparatus in the trunk, including the skull, and it would make a good story."

"You say he vanished?" Bob asked.

"The whole thing is becoming quite mysterious." Jupiter frowned a bit. "A vanishing magician, a vanishing trunk, and a skull that is supposed to talk. Very mysterious indeed."

"Now wait a minute, wait a minute!" Pete protested. "I don't like the look on your face, Jupe. You're thinking of turning this into an investigation, and I don't want to investigate any talking skulls. As far as I'm concerned, such a thing doesn't exist and I don't want to learn different."

"We can't very well investigate anything now that the trunk is gone," Jupiter told him. "But I would like to know about The Great Gulliver, Fred."

"Sure," the reporter said. He sat down on one of Jupe's unpainted iron chairs. "I'll give you the background. Gulliver was a small-time magician, but he had this skull that apparently talked. It would sit on a glass table, with no apparatus around it, and answer questions."

"Ventriloquism?" Jupiter asked. "Gulliver actually did the talking without moving his lips?"

"Well, maybe. But it would talk when Gulliver was sitting across the room from it, and sometimes even when he was out of the room. Even other magicians couldn't figure out how it was done. But eventually it got him into trouble with the police."

"How did that happen?" Bob asked.

"Well, Gulliver wasn't doing very well as a

plained about the visit earlier from the tall, thin magician.

"If he tried to buy the trunk, he certainly wasn't behind its theft," Fred said. "I wonder if the thieves thought they could put Socrates to work for them. Well, I don't suppose it matters. I was hoping to get a good story with a picture of you boys with the skull, and maybe you, Jupiter, dressed up in Gulliver's robes. But that's impossible, so I'd better be going. Nice to have seen you again."

Fred Brown drove away. Jupiter looked unhappy.

"It certainly would have been an interesting mystery to investigate," he said. "I'm sorry the trunk is gone."

"Well, I'm not," Pete said. "Any trunk that has a talking skull in it can stay gone, as far as I'm concerned. I don't want any part of it. How can a skull talk, anyway?"

"That's part of the mystery," Jupiter answered. "But there's no use thinking about it because—Oh, here comes Uncle Titus back now."

The big truck drove into the yard, loaded with more junk for the salvage yard. Jupiter's uncle hopped out and walked over.

"Hard at work, I see," he said to them and winked. "Good thing Mathilda isn't here. She'd find something for you to do. But you all look pretty thoughtful. Thinking about something important?"

"The truth is, we're thinking about that trunk that disappeared last night," Jupiter told him. "We've just learned something interesting about it."

"Oh, that trunk." Titus Jones chuckled. "It hasn't showed up again, then?"

"Why, no, it hasn't," Jupiter said. "I don't suppose we'll ever see it again."

"Now I wouldn't say that," Titus Jones told him.

thieves. There's only one conclusion. The trunk was already stolen before those two men got here!"

Mr Jones chuckled. "Jupiter," he said, "you're smart. But sometimes it does a person good to find out he isn't as smart as he thinks he is. There's another conclusion you've missed. Maybe the trunk wasn't stolen. Maybe those two men just couldn't find it."

"But I left it beside the office," Jupiter said. "Right out in plain sight. Maybe I should have locked it inside the office, but I didn't think it was valuable enough for that."

"And after you went in to get washed up for supper, and Hans and I were locking up," Titus Jones said, "I said to myself, 'That's a magician's trunk, and wouldn't it be a surprise for Jupiter if it disappeared magically! He could have some good exercise hunting for it.' So I played a little joke on you, Jupiter. I hid the trunk. Then when we surprised those would-be thieves, I thought I'd just leave it hidden until morning in case they tried again. I was going to tell you about it. But then I decided to see if you could figure things out for yourself. Stimulate your thinking machinery a little."

"You hid it?" Bob burst out. "Where, Mr. Jones?" And Pete echoed, "Where?"

"Where would a good place to hide a trunk so it wouldn't be noticed?" Mr Jones asked. But already Jupiter was looking all around them, at the piles of timber and old machinery and other objects that crowded the yard. The trunk could have been hidden under almost anything. But Jupiter's gaze came to rest on something over against the wall. There was a six-foot-wide roof extending from the top of the wall into the yard, and under this roof were kept the more valuable items in the salvage yard, where they would

be protected from the occasional southern California rain.

In one spot half-a-dozen old trunks were lined up. They were all sturdy and in good repair. And they were all large.

"The perfect place to hide a small trunk would be in a big trunk!" Jupiter burst out. "Is that what you did, Uncle Titus?"

"You could always look and see," his uncle suggested.

Jupiter started towards the trunks. But Pete ran ahead and flung open the first trunk. It was empty. Jupiter opened the next one. It, too, was empty. So were the third and the fourth.

By the time they got to the fifth trunk, Bob had joined them. And as the lid went up, they all stared.

Inside the big trunk, just fitting neatly, was the y trunk of The Great Gulliver.

The three boys were back in Jupiter's workshop, hidden from the front of the salvage yard by piles of second-hand material. They had swiftly taken the auction trunk from its hiding place back to where they could work on it unseen.

The three boys were back in Jupiter's workshop, hidden from the front of the salvage yard by piles of second-hand material. They had swiftly taken the auction trunk from its hiding place back to where they could work on it unseen.

As Jupiter worked on the lock, he was still feeling annoyed with himself for not suspecting that the trunk had been in the yard all along. Uncle Titus had played an embarrassing joke on him, but a good one. He should have known better than to jump to conclusions the night before. He should have at least realized the truth by morning, he reflected. He had let surface appearances deceive him completely.

Bob and Pete smiled and nodded.

"What about Mr Maximilian?" Bob asked.

promised to let him know if the trunk reappeared."

"We promised to let him know before we sold it to anyone else," Jupiter said. "We aren't planning on selling it, at least not now."

"I vote to sell it," Pete said. "After all, Maximilian offered us a pretty nice profit."

But the idea of owning a talking skull had gripped Jupiter's imagination.

"We can think about selling it later," he said. "I want to find out if Socrates will really talk."

"That's what I was afraid of," Pete said with a sigh.

Jupe continued trying the keys. Finally one made the old lock turn. After unbuckling the two long leather straps that held the lid down, Jupiter lifted the lid.

They all peered in. A length of red silk cloth covered the inside of the trunk. Beneath the cloth was the top tray of the trunk, where a number of small objects were packed, some of them wrapped in different-coloured silk cloths. There was a collapsible birdcage, a small crystal ball with a stand, many small red balls, several packs of playing cards, and some metal cups that fitted snugly into one another. There was not, however, a skull or any bundle big enough to contain one.

"Some of Gulliver's magic tricks," Jupiter stated. "If there's anything important, it'll be underneath, I guess."

He and Pete lifted out the top tray and set it to one side. Underneath there seemed to be mostly clothing. It was not ordinary clothing, however, for as they lifted it out, piece by piece, they saw that it consisted of several silk jackets, a long golden robe, a turban, and other Oriental-looking clothing.

It was Bob who spotted what they were looking for.

"There it is!" he said. "There at the side. Under

that purple cloth. Something round. I bet it's the skull."

"I think you're right, Records," Jupiter agreed.

Jupe lifted out the round object and Bob whisked the purple wrappings. There in Jupiter's hands sat skull, gleaming white, that seemed to look up at him of empty eye sockets. It was not a scary skull—somehow it even seemed friendly. It reminded the boys of the complete skeleton in the biology department at school, which everyone called Mr Bones. They quite used to Mr Bones, so they weren't nervous now about the magician's skull.

"I guess that's Socrates, all right," Bob said.

"There's something under it," Jupiter said. Handing Socrates to Bob, he delved down into the trunk. He came up with a disk two inches thick and about six inches across, apparently made of ivory. Strange symbols were cut into the edge of it.

"This looks like a stand for Socrates to sit on," Jupiter said. "It has depressions that would be just right to hold him."

He put the ivory disk on a nearby table and Bob placed the skull on it. Socrates sat there with what seemed to be a grin while they all stared at him.

"He certainly looks as if he might say something," Bob commented. "But if he does, I'm going to find business someplace else."

"Probably only Gulliver could make him speak," Jupiter suggested. "My theory is that he has some kind of mechanism inside."

He picked Socrates up and peered at him closely.

"Not a sign," Jupiter muttered. "If there was anything inside him I'm sure I could spot it. There would be some evidence, and there isn't—nothing at all. It's very baffling."

He put Socrates back on his ivory stand.

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reading white

"Socrates, if you can really talk, say something," he ordered.

His only answer was silence.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be in a talking mood," Jupiter said at last. "Let's see what else is in the trunk."

He and Bob and Pete began pulling out more Oriental costumes. Then they found a magician's wand, and several short, curved swords. They were examining these, their backs to Socrates, when a muffled sneeze sounded behind them.

They whirled around. No one was there. No one, that is, but the skull.

Socrates had sneezed!

He was speaking of the famous motion-picture producer who had steered them to several of their most mystifying cases and who took a keen interest in their work.

"Now wait a minute!" Pete cried. "Last night two men tried to steal this trunk. Today we open it and find a sneezing skull in it. The next thing you know—"

He was interrupted by Mathilda Jones's powerful voice.

"Jupiter! Boys! I know you're back there! Come a-running. There's work to be done!"

"Oh, oh!" Bob said. "Your aunt wants us."

"And that's her 'don't-make-me-wait' voice," Pete added as Mathilda Jones's voice came again, calling to Jupiter. "We'd better get out front."

"Yes, indeed," Jupiter said hastily. He put Socrates back in the trunk and locked it and then they all trotted to the front section of the salvage yard. Mrs. Jones was waiting, her hands on her hips.

"There you are!" she said. "It's about time. Your Uncle Titus and Hans and Konrad have unloaded all that stuff he brought, and I'd like you boys to sort it out and stack it."

The three boys looked at the pile of second-hand goods in front of the office and sighed. It would take a long time to put it all away neatly, but one thing Mrs. Jones insisted on was neatness. The Jones Salvage Yard was a junkyard, but a very high class and unusual one, and she would tolerate no unnecessary untidiness.

The boys set to work, pausing only for the lunch that Mrs. Jones brought out to them. Just when they seemed almost finished, Titus Jones arrived with another truckload of furniture and odds and ends he had bought from an apartment house going out of business.

him on his ivory base on the bureau. Then he went back downstairs to watch television.

By the time he went to bed he had decided that Socrates couldn't possibly talk. The answer must be that The Great Gulliver, his owner, had been a very gifted ventriloquist.

He had almost fallen asleep when a soft whistle roused him. It came again, and it sounded as if it were right in the room with him.

Suddenly wide awake, Jupiter sat upright in bed.

"Who's that? Is that you, Uncle Titus?" he asked, thinking for a moment that his uncle might be playing another joke.

"It is I," came a soft, rather high-pitched voice from the darkness in the direction of his bureau. "Socrates."

"Socrates?" Jupiter gulped.

"The time has come . . . to speak. Do not turn on . . . the light. Just listen and . . . do not be frightened. Do you . . . understand?"

The words came as if with difficulty. Jupiter stared through the darkness to where Socrates was but could see nothing.

"Well—all right." He spoke the words with a slight gulp.

"Good," said the voice. "You must go . . . tomorrow . . . to 311 King Street. The password . . . is Socrates. Do you . . . understand?"

"Yes," said Jupiter, more boldly. "But what is this all about? Who is talking to me?"

"I . . . Socrates." The whispering voice trailed away. Jupiter reached out and switched on the bed-side lamp. He stared across at Socrates. The skull seemed to grin back, quite silent now.

Socrates couldn't have been speaking to him! But—the voice had been in his room. It hadn't come from the window.

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At the thought of the window, Jupiter turned to it. He peered out. The yard outside was quite open, and there was no one in sight anywhere.

Extremely baffled, Jupiter got back into bed.

The message had been for him to go to 311 King Street the next day. Maybe he shouldn't—but he knew he would. The mystery was getting more perplexing.

And if there was anything Jupiter couldn't resist, it was a good mystery.

Mysterious Message

OUR'S SURE you don't want me to come in with u, Jupe?" Pete asked.

Sitting in the front seat of the light truck, which had driven into Los Angeles for them, Pete and piter were staring at the dingy building which stood 311 King Street. A faded sign on the porch said . Underneath was a smaller sign that said *No ocancies.*

The neighbourhood was run-down. There were rooming houses and some stores, and everything paint and repair. The few people on the street quite old. It seemed to be a street where elderly with small incomes lived.

"I don't think so, Second," Jupiter answered. "You 't here for me in the truck with Hans. I don't think 's any danger."

Pete swallowed hard. "You say the skull *told* you come here?" he asked. "Just like that? Sitting on bureau it talked to you in the dark?"

"Either that or I had a very remarkable dream," piter told him. "But I wasn't asleep so I don't think dreaming. I'll go in and see what it's all about. I'm not out in twenty minutes, you and Hans come after me."

"Well, if you say so," Pete agreed. "But there's a about this business I don't like."

"If there's any danger," Jupiter said "I'll yell as y as I can for help."

his eyes. The room was bright and sunny, and after the dark hall it took him a moment to see the old woman sitting in a big rocking chair. She was knitting something while looking at him keenly through old-fashioned spectacles.

She wore a bright red-and-yellow robe and had large gold rings in her ears. As she peered up at him, Jupiter suddenly realized she was a Gypsy. Her first words confirmed this.

"I am Zelda, the Gypsy," she said in a soft, husky voice. "What does the young man wish? To have his fortune told?"

"No, ma'am," Jupiter said politely. "Mr Socrates told me to come here."

"Ah, Mr Socrates," the old Gypsy woman said. "But Mr Socrates is dead."

Thinking of the skull, Jupiter had to admit that Socrates was dead, all right.

"But still he spoke to you," Zelda murmured. "Strange, very strange. Sit down, young man. There, at that table. I shall consult the crystal."

Jupiter sat down at a small table made of rich wood inlaid with ivory in strange designs. Zelda rose and seated herself opposite him. From beneath the table she picked up a small box, out of which she took a crystal ball. She put the ball in the centre of the table.

"Silence!" she hissed. "Say nothing. Do not disturb the crystal."

Jupiter nodded. The old Gypsy placed her hands lightly on the table and leaned forward to stare into the shiny crystal ball. She was very still. Indeed, she seemed to have stopped breathing. Long moments passed. At last she spoke.

"I see a trunk," she murmured. "I see men—many men who wish the trunk. I see another man. He is afraid. His name begins with B—no, with G. He is



afraid and he wishes help. He is asking you to help him. The crystal clears! I see money—much money. Many men want it. But it is hidden. It is behind a cloud, it vanishes, no one knows where it goes.

"The crystal is clouding. The man whose name begins with G is gone. He has vanished from the world of men. He is dead, yet he lives. I can see no more."

The old Gypsy woman, who had been leaning forward to stare intently into the crystal ball, straightened with a sigh.

"To read the crystal takes much effort," she said. "For today I can do no more. Did my vision have meaning to you, young man?"

Jupiter scowled in puzzlement.

"Part of it did," he said. "About the trunk. I have a trunk that people seem to want. And G could stand for Gulliver. The Great Gulliver, the magician, that is."

"The Great Gulliver," the Gypsy murmured. "To be sure. He was a friend of the Gypsies. But he has disappeared."

"You said he has vanished from the world of men," Jupiter told her. "That he is dead, yet he lives. I don't understand that part at all. What does it mean?"

"I cannot say." The Gypsy shook her head. "But the crystal does not lie. We Gypsies would like to find Gulliver and bring him back, for he was our friend. Perhaps you can help. You are clever, and though you are a boy, your eye is keen. You see things that sometimes men do not see."

"I don't know how I could help," Jupiter objected. "I don't know anything about Gulliver. And I certainly haven't heard anything about any money. All I did was buy Gulliver's trunk at an auction. It had Socrates' his talking skull, in it. Socrates told me to come here. That's all I know."

Pete and Jupiter peered back through the rear window. Behind them was indeed a black car, now trying to overtake them. However, the road was empty, and Hans kept the truck in the middle of it so that the black car could not pass.

In this fashion they raced along for half a mile, then saw a freeway ahead of them. Los Angeles has many freeways—roads from four to eight lanes wide that carry traffic through the crowded city without intersections or stop lights. Some are elevated above the ordinary streets, and this was one of them.

"I get on the freeway!" Hans muttered. "They do not try to stop us there. Too much traffic."

Hans turned into the entrance road leading up to the freeway, hardly slackening speed. The truck leaned far over, then in a moment emerged on the broad freeway, where many cars sped along in both directions.

The car behind them did not try to follow. The driver must have realized that he could not stop them—if that was his plan—in the midst of so much traffic, and on a roadway where stopping was forbidden. The black car went on beneath the freeway and vanished.

"We lost them okay," Hans said. "I like to get my hands on them, bang their heads together. Where to now, Jupe?"

"Back home, Hans," Jupiter said. "What is it, Pete? What are you scowling about?"

"I don't like any of this," Pete said. "A skull that talks to you in the night. People trying to steal the trunk, and then following us. It makes me nervous. I say let's forget the whole business."

"I don't think we can forget it," Jupiter said thoughtfully. "It looks as if we have a mystery on our hands that we're going to have to solve whether we want to or not."

Good-bye to Socrates

WHEN they arrived back at The Jones Salvage Yard, Mathilda Jones had some jobs for Jupe to do. Pete pitched in to help and they were kept busy until after lunch. About that time Bob arrived, having finished his morning's work at the local library. All three boys made their way back to the workshop where the old-fashioned trunk still sat beneath the old canvas Jupiter had thrown over it.

After telling Bob about the events of the morning, Jupiter said, "According to the Gypsy, Zelda, some money apparently disappeared in some way, and that seems to be connected up with The Great Gulliver's disappearance."

"Maybe he took the money and went to Europe, or something," Bob suggested.

"No." Jupiter shook his head. "Zelda said he needed help, that he had vanished from the world of men, was dead, yet lived, and she and the other Gypsies would like to help him return. That's all very puzzling, but what I deduce is that Gulliver didn't vanish *with* the money, but *because* of the money."

"Maybe he had the money hidden in the trunk," Pete suggested, "and some tough characters were after it? Remember, Fred Brown mentioned that some tough eggs were interested in him just before he disappeared. Maybe he hid from them."

"But why would he leave the money in the

trunk?" Jupiter asked. "Still, maybe he did so the first thing to do is look thoroughly."

But half an hour later, when they had totally unpacked the trunk and had inspected everything in it carefully, they found no sign of money or anything else valuable.

"That's that," Pete said. "Nothing."

"Money in big bills," Jupiter said. "could be hidden under the lining of the trunk and not be noticed. Look down there in the corner there's a slight tear in the lining."

"You think it could be hidden there?" Bob asked. "It's not nearly a big enough bump." He reached down and thrust a finger through the tear in the lining.

"There is, there's something here!" he cried excitedly. "Paper! Maybe it's money!"

Carefully he pulled out the paper he had touched and held it up.

"Not money," he said. "Just an old letter."

"Hmm," Jupiter murmured. "Let me inspect it. . . . It's addressed to Gulliver at a hotel and it's post-marked about a year ago. So he got it just about the time he disappeared. After he got it, he must have cut the lining of his trunk and hidden the letter. That means he considered it important."

"Maybe it's a clue to the money Zelda mentioned," Bob said. "It may have a map or something in it."

He and Pete crowded close as Jupiter pulled a single sheet from the envelope. On it was written a short note. It said:

*State Prison Hospital
July 17*

Dear Gulliver:

Just a few words from your old pal a

cellmate, Spike Neely. I'm in the hospital, and it looks like I haven't got much longer.

I may last five days, or three weeks, or even two months, the doctors aren't sure. But in any case, it's time to say good-bye.

If you're ever in Chicago, look up my cousin Danny Street. Tell him hello for me. Wish I could say more, but this is all I can manage.

Your friend,
Spike

"It's just a letter," Pete said. "From somebody Gulliver knew when he was in jail for fortune-telling I guess. It doesn't mean anything."

"Maybe it does and maybe it doesn't," Jupiter said.

If it doesn't mean anything, why did Gulliver hide it?" Bob asked.

"That's exactly the point," Jupiter said. "Why did he hide it? It looks as if he considered it important somehow."

Pete scratched his head. "Well, it certainly doesn't mean anything about any money."

"This Spike Neely was in the prison hospital when he wrote it," Bob said. "I think that letters from prisoners are always read by the authorities before they are mailed. So Spike couldn't say anything about money without letting the prison authorities in on it."

"Unless somehow he did it secretly," Jupiter suggested.

"You mean a message in invisible ink, something like that?" Pete asked.

"It's a possibility. I suggest we take this letter into the laboratory and analyse it."

Jupiter went over to the iron grillwork that seemed

to be leaning against the back of the printing press they had rebuilt some time ago. When moved aside, the grillwork revealed the opening of Tunnel Two, their main entrance into Headquarters. Tunnel Two was a length of large iron pipe about two feet in diameter, ridged the way pipes used in culverts are. It went, partly underground, beneath a pile of rather worthless junk until it came up underneath Headquarters, which was a mobile home trailer hidden from sight in the midst of the junk.

Jupiter went first, then Bob, then Pete, scrambling on hands and knees through Tunnel Two, which was padded with old rags so the corrugations in the pipe would not bruise their knees. They pushed up the trap-door at the other end and clambered out into the tiny office of Headquarters.

The three boys had built a tiny laboratory in the old trailer, complete with microscope and other necessary items. There was only room for one at a time in the lab, so Jupiter took the letter in while Pete and Bob watched from the narrow door. First Jupe put the letter under a microscope and went over it inch by inch.

"Nothing," he said. "Now I'll test for the most common kind of invisible ink."

He reached for a jar of acid and poured some into a glass beaker. He held the letter above the beaker in the acid fumes, moving it back and forth. Nothing happened.

"As I expected," he said. "Logic says that someone in a prison hospital wouldn't be able to get hold of invisible ink, anyway. He just might be able to get a lemon, though, and lemon juice is a very simple kind of invisible ink. When you write with it, the writing can't be seen, but if the paper is heated, the writing written in lemon juice will appear. Let's try that."

cause he knew the letter would be read first by the police."

"Just the same, somebody thinks there's a clue in that trunk," Pete stated. "They want the trunk because of the clue they expect to find. If we don't want trouble with some tough characters who will probably keep trying to get the trunk, we'd better get rid of it right away."

"Pete has something there," Bob said. "We can't solve the mystery because we haven't any clue. If we want to avoid trouble, we'd better get rid of the trunk. It doesn't mean anything to us, after all."

"Maximilian the Mystic wants us to sell it to him," Pete put in. "I vote we put Socrates back in the trunk and let Mr Maximilian have the whole shooting match. Get it off our hands. It's too dangerous to keep around. How about it, Jupe?"

"Mmm." Jupiter pinched his lip. "Zelda seemed to think we could help somehow, but it certainly doesn't look like it. Two men follow us this morning when we left Zelda's house and I don't like that very much either."

"All right, we'll telephone Mr Maximilian, since he wants the trunk so badly. We'll repack it and put Socrates back in. But we'll have to warn him about other people wanting the trunk, so he'll know. And I won't charge him a hundred dollars—just the dollar I paid for it."

"It would be awfully nice to have a hundred dollars," Pete said.

"It wouldn't be fair, if the trunk is dangerous," Jupiter said. "I'll call him in a minute. First I want to photograph this letter in case I get any new ideas."

Jupiter made several photographs of both the letter and the envelope. Then he phoned Maximilian the Mystic, who said he'd be right over for the

"Maybe he has a sense of humour," Pete said. "Let's get him packed."

"After this new development," Jupiter said, "maybe we ought to keep Socrates and the trunk for a while. Perhaps he's ready to talk some more."

"Oh, no!" Pete said, grabbing Socrates, wrapping him up, and stowing him in the old trunk. "Your aunt says you have to get rid of him, and we'd agreed to get rid of him. We also agreed to let Mr Maximilian have him and we can't go back on our word now. I'm not in any mood to hear talk coming from a skull. Some mysteries I don't want to solve."

He closed the lid and snapped the lock shut. Just as Jupiter was trying to think of an argument, they heard Hans calling.

"Jupel! Hey, Jupel! Somebody here to see you."

"I bet that's Mr Maximilian," Bob said as he and the others started towards the front of the salvage yard.

It was indeed the tall thin magician, standing waiting for them, ignoring the other customers wandering around and the piles of interesting junk.

"Well, boy," he exclaimed, peering at Jupiter. "So Gulliver's trunk turned up, did it?"

"Yes, sir," Jupiter answered. "And you can have it if you really want it."

"Of course I want it! Didn't I say so? Here's the money—one hundred dollars."

"I'm not going to charge you a hundred dollars for it," Jupiter said. "I paid a dollar for it and you can have it for a dollar."

"Humph!" the man snorted. "Why are you being so generous, may I ask? Have you taken something valuable from it?"

"No, sir, the trunk is just the way it was when we got it. But there's a mystery connected with it, and

"They've Flown the Coop!"

THE REST OF THE DAY passed without anything special happening. Bob went home early to see his father. Mr Andrews, a feature writer for a big Los Angeles newspaper, was often away in the evening, but tonight he would be home.

"Well, Bob," his father remarked during dinner, "I saw your picture in the Hollywood paper, with the story of your friend Jupiter buying an old trunk at auction. Did you find anything interesting in it?"

"We found a skull that was supposed to be able to talk," Bob answered. "It's name is Socrates."

"A talking skull named Socrates!" his mother exclaimed. "Good gracious, what an idea! I hope it didn't talk to you."

"No, Mom, it didn't talk to me," Bob said. He thought of mentioning that it had talked to Jupiter but decided against it. Especially as his father immediately remarked, with a smile, "Some simple trick of that magician it was supposed to have belonged to, of course—what was his name? Alexander?"

"Gulliver," Bob corrected. "The Great Gulliver."

"I imagine the man was a good ventriloquist," Mr Andrews said. "What is Jupiter doing with it? Not keeping it, I hope."

"No, he sold it," Bob said. "To another magician who said he used to know Mr Gulliver. A man who calls himself Maximilian the Mystic."

"Maximilian the Mystic?" his father frowned.

"Then apparently the two men deliberately wrecked Mr Maximilian's car in order to get the trunk!" Jupiter exclaimed.

"Exactly what we figured out," agreed Chief Reynolds. "Maximilian couldn't talk much—the doctor wouldn't let him. He said he bought the trunk from you, Jupiter, and then the doctor said he'd talked enough. So I've come to find out what was in the trunk that would make someone want to steal it."

"Well," Jupiter told him as Pete and Bob listened intently, "there was mostly clothing in it. There was some magical apparatus. The main thing in it was an old skull that was supposed to be able to talk."

"A skull able to talk!" Chief Reynolds exploded. "That sounds crazy! Skulls can't talk!"

"No, sir," Jupiter agreed. "But this one used to belong to another magician named The Great Gulliver and—" He proceeded to tell Chief Reynolds the whole story of how they had bought the trunk at auction, what they had learned about Gulliver, how he had spent some time in jail, then had disappeared after being released.

Chief Reynolds listened, frowning and chewing his lips.

"That's certainly a mixed-up story," he said when Jupiter had finished. "You must have imagined it when you thought you heard the skull talk to you in your room the other night. Maybe it was a dream."

"I thought of that, sir. But when I went to the address it gave me, I found the Gypsy woman, Zelda, who seemed to know about Gulliver. She said he was no longer in the world of men."

Chief Reynolds sighed and mopped his forehead.

"And she spouted this stuff about hidden money that she claimed to see in the crystal, eh?" he muttered. "Well, it's certainly strange. Now about this

thugs would force a car off the road just to steal a trunk. They must have been watching the salvage yard. Must have seen you put the trunk in Maximilian's car and followed him."

Jupiter said nothing, for at this point he had no new ideas and had to admit that he was completely puzzled by the whole affair.

The police car drove swiftly, and soon they were in front of the run-down building where Jupe had called on Zelda. Chief Reynolds led the way up the path to the small porch and rang the door-bell vigorously.

They waited. There was no answer. Chief Reynolds started to look rather grim. Then an old woman sweeping the steps of the next house called to them.

"If you're looking for those Gypsies," she said, "they're gone."

"Gone!" the Chief exclaimed. "Where'd they go?"

"Who knows where Gypsies go?" The old woman cackled. "They drove away bag and baggage in some old cars early this morning. Didn't say a word to anybody. Just cleared out."

"Thunder!" Chief Reynolds growled. "There goes our only lead. They've flown the coop!"

Warning from Chief Reynolds

"THE MEETING will come to order," Jupiter said.

Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw settled themselves in their chairs. Jupiter rapped a pencil on the wooden desk in front of him in the tiny office in Headquarters.

"The Three Investigators will now discuss future projects," he said. "The meeting is now open for anyone to make suggestions." When neither Bob nor Pete said anything, he added, "We all have a day off today. How shall we spend it?"

Two days had passed since the visit from Chief Reynolds. They had been quiet days, in which the three boys had put in a good many hours repairing and rebuilding second-hand items in the salvage yard. No one had come in with a mystery to be solved, rather to Bob and Pete's relief. They were glad to have things quiet for a change. They were especially glad to have the curious problem of the talking skull and the mystery trunk off their hands.

"I move we go scuba diving today," Pete said. "It's a swell day for it and we haven't done any diving lately. We'll get rusty."

"I second the motion," Bob chimed in. "It's a hot day and the water will feel good."

At that moment the telephone rang.

They all jumped slightly and looked at it. The telephone, which they paid for out of their earnings in the salvage yard, was listed in Jupiter's name. Only a few

people knew that it was The Three Investigators' official phone. It did not ring often, but when it did the call was usually important.

The phone rang again, and Jupiter picked it up.

"Hello," he said. "The Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Hello, Jupiter," answered Police Chief Reynolds. They could all hear him over the loud-speaker arrangement Jupiter had rigged up. "I called your house and your aunt told me to try this number."

"Yes, Chief?" Jupiter answered alertly.

"I told you I was going to start some inquiries," the Chief said. "You know, about that letter you photographed, and Spike Neely and The Great Gulliver. Well, I've had some answers. I'm not sure what it all means, but I'd like to talk to you some more. Can you come down to my office?"

"Yes, sir!" Jupiter said with a trace of excitement. "Right now, Chief Reynolds?"

"As good a time as any," the Chief replied. "I'm not busy this morning."

"We'll be there in twenty minutes," Jupiter told him and hung up. "Well," he said to the other two, "that takes care of our plans for this morning, anyway. Chief Reynolds has some new information."

"Oh, no!" Pete groaned. "We told him everything we knew. Anyway, you did. As far as I'm concerned, that whole business of the trunk and the skull is closed. Finished. Washed up. Out of our hands. Done with."

"Well, of course, if you don't want to come with me, I can probably handle it by myself," Jupiter said.

Bob grinned. Pete's face was a study in conflicting emotions. He didn't want to be left out of anything, no matter how much he protested.

"Oh, we'll come with you," Pete said. "The Three



The boys waited expectantly for the Chief to speak.

"However, and this seems to be the big point, the money was never recovered. He hid it and hid it well. Nobody could even get him to admit he had stolen it. Undoubtedly he planned to leave it hidden until he got out of prison and then recover it.

"Now let's take this whole thing step by step. Six years ago, Spike was captured in Chicago, about a month after the bank robbery. He probably hid the money in Chicago, but he could have hidden it right here in the Los Angeles area.

"You see, the police learned that before he went to Chicago he spent a week hiding in the home of his sister in Los Angeles. Her name is Mrs Miller—Mrs Mary Miller. She was questioned at the time, but she couldn't tell the police anything helpful. She's a very respectable woman. Until the police came, she never even knew her brother was a bank robber.

"Thinking that Spike might have hidden the money in her house before he went to Chicago, the police searched it thoroughly. They didn't find anything. As he arrived there the same day he pulled the robbery up in San Francisco, he must have had the money with him. So the official theory is that Spike hid the money in Chicago."

"In the letter he wrote to Gulliver a year ago, he mentions a cousin, Danny Street, in Chicago," Jupiter put in. "Could he have left the money with him?"

"The prison authorities thought of that, Jupiter. As you suspected, they read the letter to Gulliver very carefully before they mailed it. In fact, they wired Chicago to investigate Danny Street. But the Chicago police couldn't find anyone named Street who had the slightest connection with Spike Neely.

"They finally decided the letter was harmless, so they mailed it. First, they analysed it in every

way for a secret message, but they couldn't find any."

"Neither could I," Jupiter admitted. He was pinching his lips to put his mental machinery in high gear. "Just the same, I deduce that some other criminals, learning of the letter, suspected it actually did tell where the money is, somehow. So they took to shadowing The Great Gulliver. That's when he got frightened and disappeared."

"Or was killed," Chief Reynolds said gravely. "I think it's plain that Gulliver never found the money. But someone may have tried to make him tell where it was, and got angry when he wouldn't—because he couldn't. On the other hand, he may have just taken alarm and gone into hiding, leaving his trunk behind."

"He must have suspected Spike Neely was trying to tell him something," Jupiter was thinking hard. "Otherwise why would he hide the letter? Let's suppose he just disappeared. Then these other criminals, who are still around, read in the paper of my buying Gulliver's trunk. They believed that there might be a clue to the stolen money in the trunk."

"That first night, they tried to steal it but were foiled because Uncle Titus had hidden it. Then they took to following me around. They were watching the salvage yard, figuring how to get their hands on the trunk, when they saw us sell it to Maximilian the Mystic. So they followed Mr Maximilian, forced his car off the road, and stole the trunk."

"They sure wanted that trunk badly!" Pete exclaimed. "I'm glad we got rid of it in time."

"You really should have brought the trunk to me," the Chief pointed out.

"We suggested that, sir, to Mr Maximilian," Jupiter answered. "He wouldn't hear of it. He wanted the trunk. And of course we didn't know."

we notice anyone who does seem suspicious. we'll notify you immediately."

"Be sure you do," said Chief Reynolds.

In a very thoughtful mood, The Three Investigators left Police Headquarters and rode back to the salvage yard.

of mind until the money is found. We're investigators—it'll be a real challenge to us."

Pete groaned.

"How would we start, Jupe?" Bob asked.

"First we have to assume that the money is hidden somewhere here in the Los Angeles region," Jupiter said slowly. "Obviously, if it's hidden in Chicago we haven't a chance of finding it."

Pete's expression said he didn't think they had a chance anyway.

"Next," Jupiter said, "we have to find out all we can about Spike Neely's actions when he was hiding out at his sister's house. That means we must locate the sister, Mrs Miller, and ask her to tell us everything she can."

"But Chief Reynolds said the police questioned her at the time," Bob protested. "If they didn't learn anything, how can we?"

"I don't know," Jupiter told him. "But we have to try. It's our only lead. I know it's a long shot, but when there's nothing else to do, you have to try the long shot. Just possibly we might think of some questions the police forgot to ask."

"I wish you'd never read that piece in the paper about the auction," Pete muttered. "All right, how do we start?"

"First," Jupiter began, but he was interrupted by his aunt's powerful voice calling to them.

"Boys! Lunch! Come and get it while it's hot."

Pete jumped up. "That's the first thing I've heard today that I've liked!" he exclaimed. "Let's eat. Then we can think about your idea, Jupe."

In a few minutes the boys were seated in Aunt Mathilda's kitchen. Mrs Jones bustled about serving them generous helpings of sausages and beans. Presently Titus Jones came in and joined them.

"Gypsies!" Mrs Jones snorted, seating herself at the table. "Jupiter, now that you've got rid of that horrible old skull, don't tell me you're getting mixed up with Gypsies somehow."

"No, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter answered. "At least I don't think I am."

"Well, they seemed friendly," Titus Jones stated, helping himself to more sausages.

The three boys finished eating in silence, and then returned to Headquarters.

"A Gypsy message," Pete said hollowly. "'A frog in a pond with hungry fish must jump hard to get out'. Does that mean what I think it means?"

Jupiter nodded. "I'm afraid so. It's a veiled warning to us that we'd better work hard to solve this case. I wish I knew where the Gypsies fitted into this, though. First I talked to Zelda. Then Zelda and all her people disappear. Now two Gypsies show up to leave a message for me, from a friend. I surmise that Zelda is the friend, but I wish she wouldn't be so mysterious."

"Me, too," Pete said, and sighed.

"Well, what do we do now?" Bob asked.

"We talk to Spike Neely's sister," Jupiter said. "We know she lives in Los Angeles. Maybe she's in the phone book."

Pete handed him the telephone book and Jupiter began phoning. In a deep voice that sounded quite adult, he said he wished to contact Mr Spike Neely. The first three women he called said they'd never heard of Spike Neely, but the fourth replied that Spike Neely was dead and it was impossible. Jupiter said "Thank you" and hung up.

"We've located the right Mrs Neely," Jupiter said. "Her address is over in

install a bathroom. He could do anything around the house and he made good money.

"As I said, when Spike visited us, he helped on whatever job my husband might have at the time. But this time he didn't seem to want to go out of the house. He seemed nervous. His speech defect was worse than usual. You know that's how he was finally caught—he had trouble pronouncing the letter 'l' in words. For instance, if he said 'flower,' it came out 'Tower'.

"Anyway, I know now that he was hiding out after the bank robbery in San Francisco. So for almost a week Spike stayed home by himself—I had a job then, too.

"He did make himself useful. He painted and papered the downstairs rooms. You know how it is—a busy workman like my husband neglects his own home to do the outside jobs.

"But then my husband got sick. He was working on a big redecorating job for some restaurant and got too sick to finish. He asked Spike to take over for him, and Spike could hardly refuse. But I remember he dressed in baggy overalls and wore dark glasses every time he left the house.

"It took Spike several days to finish the job, and all that time my husband got worse. We were just going to move him to a hospital when he unexpectedly died."

Mrs Miller sniffed and dabbed at her eyes a moment.

"I certainly thought Frank would stay with me then, to help me, but he didn't. He left even before the funeral. He said he had to leave in a hurry and he just packed up and went. I was very surprised. Later, I figured it out."

"You did?" Jupiter asked. "What was his reason?"

"It was the death notice in the newspaper for my

An Unpleasant Surprise

BOTH Bob and Pete looked at Jupe in amazement.

"But Chief Reynolds said the police searched the house and didn't find anything," Bob reminded him.

"Because somehow Spike Neely was too clever," Jupiter said. "He hid the money so well that an ordinary search couldn't find it. Fifty thousand dollars in large bills wouldn't make a very big package. He could have tucked it away in the attic, under the eaves, or somewhere like that. He planned to come visiting you again, Mrs Miller, when the coast was clear, and get the money back. Only he got sent to jail and died there."

"He did ask Mrs Miller if she was going to stay here!" Bob said excitedly. "That shows he planned to come back."

"And he had several days in which to think of a hiding place no one would suspect," Pete put in, showing some excitement himself. "It would have to be tricky, to fool the police, but I'll bet you can find it, Jupe!"

"Would you be willing to let us just look around a little, Mrs Miller?" Jupiter asked hopefully. "Just to see if we can spot any likely place?"

Mrs Miller shook her head.

"It does seem possible, the way you reason it out," she said, "but you couldn't ever find the money in this house." She shook her head again. "You see, this

All three boys were in much better spirits now, though Pete still had some doubts.

"After all, Jupe," he said, "we can't be positive that Spike Neely hid the money he stole in his sister's house."

Jupiter shook his head.

"It's the only logical place, Pete," he said. "It's where I would have hidden the money if I'd been Spike Neely."

After making a number of turns, they came out on Danville Street.

"This is the nine-hundred block," Jupiter announced. "Turn left, Konrad, the five-hundred block should be in that direction."

Konrad turned and all three boys watched the passing houses sharply, reading the street numbers.

"We're in the eight-hundred block now," Bob announced. "Three more blocks and we should be there."

They travelled along past a number of small, neat houses sitting on well-tended grounds. Now all three boys were leaning forward and craning their necks.

"It ought to be right in the next block," Bob said eagerly. "About the middle of the block, I'd say. On the right-hand side, of course, because that's where the even-numbered houses are."

"Stop in the middle of the next block, Konrad," Jupe directed.

"Okay, Jupe," the driver agreed.

He drove a minute and stopped.

"This is the place, Jupe?"

Jupiter did not answer. He was staring open-mouthed at a large apartment house that took up most of the block on the right-hand side of the street. There were no small, private residences at all on that side.

With some difficulty he and Pete carried the box round the piles of second-hand material to the seclusion of the workshop. Jupiter produced his prized Swiss knife with many blades, swiftly cut through the strips of sealing paper, and folded back the top of the carton. Then all three stared with dismay at what was inside.

"Oh, no!" Pete groaned. "Not that!"

It took even Jupiter a moment to find his voice.

"Someone," he said, "has sent us back Gulliver's trunk."

They stared at the top of the trunk that they'd thought they were rid of forever. And as they did so, a very muffled voice spoke.

"Hurry!" it said. "Find—the clue."

Socrates! Speaking to them from inside the trunk!

The Three Find Some Clues

"WELL, NOW WHAT?" Pete asked gloomily.

It was quite late the following afternoon, a Saturday. The Three Investigators were gathered at the rear of The Jones Salvage Yard for a consultation. The previous evening they had felt no desire to investigate the riddle of the return of Gulliver's trunk. Its mysterious reappearance had, indeed, rather shaken them. They had hidden the box behind the printing press and agreed to put off their next move until to-day.

Bob had just arrived from his job in the local library. Jupiter, in charge of the salvage yard while his aunt and uncle were in Los Angeles for the day, was taking advantage of a lull in business to join him and Pete.

Now they were all looking at the trunk and wondering what to do with it.

"I know what," Bob said. "Let's take the trunk right down to Chief Reynolds, tell him everything we know, and let him carry on from there."

"Good idea!" Pete agreed emphatically. "Well, Jupe, what do you say?"

"I suppose so," Jupiter said slowly. "Except that we really don't know too much. We *think* Spike Neely hid the stolen money in his sister's house, but we can't be positive. It's just a good deduction."

"It's good enough for me," Bob said. "Spike showed up at his sister's house the same day he stole the money in San Francisco. So he must have had it with

have to do is go to 532 Danville Street and there it is."

When told that the house had been moved, and that a large apartment house now stood on the spot, she gave a little gasp.

"An apartment house!" she said. "No wonder the man was so anxious to buy it. If I'd known the truth, maybe I'd have asked for more money. Well, anyway, it's a cute little bungalow with brown shingle siding. Just one storey, but it has a little attic with a round window in front. I can't tell you anything special about it. It was just a nice, well-built little bungalow."

"Thank you," Jupiter said. "I'm sure the authorities will be able to locate it."

He hung up and looked at his two companions.

"The more I think about it," he said, "the more I feel sure that the money is hidden in Mrs Miller's old house, but in some tricky manner. And I'm sure there's a clue in the trunk, too."

"Even if there is, I'm tired of that trunk!" Pete said firmly. "See what happened to Maximilian the Mystic. Now the trunk's come back to us, and I don't want it. It's dangerous. Let Chief Reynolds look for the clue."

"Well, we did agree to co-operate with Chief Reynolds," Jupiter said. "So I guess the thing to do is take the trunk to him. We'd better phone to let him know we're coming."

He used the telephone again, and in a moment was connected with Police Headquarters.

"Chief Reynolds' office, Lieutenant Carter speaking," a crisp, unfamiliar voice a

"This is Jupiter Jones. May please?"

"Chief Reynolds is away until tomorrow," Lieutenant Carter replied curtly. "Try him then."

"But this may be important," Jupiter said. "You see, I think we have a clue that—"

"Forget it, kid!" Lieutenant Carter said impatiently. "I'm very busy, and one thing I don't want is boy wonders in my hair. Maybe the Chief lets you mess around in things sometimes, but personally, I think kids like you should be seen and not heard."

"But the Chief asked me—" Jupiter began.

"Take it up with him tomorrow! I have to go now!" And the phone at the other end was hung up with a bang.

Jupiter hung up also and looked blankly at Pete and Bob.

"Something tells me," Pete said, "that Lieutenant Carter doesn't like us."

"He sounded as if he didn't like anybody," Bob put in. "Especially kids."

"His attitude is quite common among adults," Jupiter said with a sigh. "They think that just because we're young we don't have any good ideas. Actually, we often have a fresh viewpoint on a problem. But I guess we can't take the trunk down to Chief Reynolds before tomorrow—maybe not even then, because tomorrow's Sunday. We may have to wait until Monday. So I suggest we search the trunk again and try to find that clue Socrates mentioned."

"I'm tired of that trunk," Pete said firmly. "I'm tired of Socrates. I don't want him talking to me."

"I don't think he'll talk to us any more," Jupiter replied. "Somehow he doesn't seem to talk face to face. He talked to me in the dark in my room, and from inside the trunk, but never directly."

"He said 'boo' to your aunt," Bob pointed out.

"Yes. I can't explain that," Jupiter admitted. "But

suppose we open the trunk and have a look. Perhaps someone took something out before returning it."

They crawled out through Tunnel Two and opened the trunk. The interior looked just as it had before. Socrates, well wrapped in old velvet, was snugly in a corner. The letter was still in place inside the tear in the lining.

Jupiter took Socrates out, unwrapped him and set him on his ivory base on the printing press. Then he picked up the letter.

"Let's have another look at this," he suggested.

All three read the letter again. It seemed as innocent as before.

*State Prison Hospital
July 17*

Dear Gulliver:

Just a few words from your old pal and cellmate, Spike Neely. I'm in the hospital, and it looks like I haven't got much longer.

I may last five days or three weeks, or even two months, the doctors aren't sure. But in any case, it's time to say good-bye.

If you're ever in Chicago, look up my cousin Danny Street. Tell him hello for me. Wish I could say more, but this is all I can manage.

Your friend,

Spike

"If there's a hidden clue there, I can't find it," Jupiter muttered. "I wonder if— Wait! I've found something. Look!"

He held out the letter and the envelope to Bob. "Do you see what we missed?"

"What we missed?" Bob looked puzzled. "No, I don't see anything special, Jupe."

"The stamps on the envelope!" Jupe said. "I didn't look under the stamps for a message!"

Bob looked at the two stamps—a two-cent stamp and a four-cent stamp. He took the envelope and ran his finger over them. His expression changed to one of great excitement.

"Jupe!" he exclaimed. "You're right! There's something under one of these stamps. The four-cent stamp feels just a little bit thicker than the two."

Pete also ran his finger over the stamps and nodded. The four-cent stamp was just a trifle thicker—just enough for the eye to notice unless you looked very closely.

"Let's get inside Headquarters and steam the stamps off and see what's underneath!" Bob exclaimed.

They scrambled back through Tunnel Two and within three minutes had a little kettle boiling in the laboratory. Jupiter held the corner of the envelope over the steam until the stamps loosened. Then he gave a shout of excitement.

"Look!" he cried. "There's another stamp underneath the four. A green one-cent."

"That's queer," Bob frowned. "What does it mean, Jupe?"

"I can tell you what it means," Pete said. "There's nothing mysterious about it. Don't you remember the time back about the time this letter was mailed, the postage rates went up by a cent? Spike Neely probably put a one-cent stamp on then realized that wouldn't be enough so he pasted on a two, then put the four-cent stamp on top of the one."

"Gosh, that could be right," Bob said. "I think Pete has hit on it, Jupe."

"I'm not so sure," Jupe scowled at the green stamp.

on the envelope. Then, carefully, he peeled it off. "There may be writing underneath it," he said.

"No," Bob announced when the stamp was off. "No writing. None on the back of any of the stamps either. What do you say now, Jupe?"

"It's too peculiar to be an accident," Jupe said, still scowling. "It has to mean something."

"Then what?" Pete demanded.

"I'm thinking," Jupiter said. "Spike knew this letter would be censored. So I deduce he used the stamps to send his message. He put one stamp under another stamp, so neatly it wouldn't be noticed. He expected Gulliver to examine the whole letter very carefully and find it. I deduce that the one-cent stamp being green, the colour of U.S. paper money, stands for the missing fifty thousand dollars. What Spike meant—"

He broke off, thinking hard. Bob's shout broke the silence.

"I've got it!" he yelled. "A stamp is a piece of paper, see? Money is paper, too. Spike put a piece of paper underneath another piece of paper. Spike was telling Gulliver that the money was hidden somewhere under some paper."

"Mrs Miller told us that while Spike was hiding out in her old house, he papered the whole downstairs. That was when he hid the fifty thousand dollars. He put the bills side by side and pasted them underneath the new wallpaper!"

"Wow!" Pete said admiringly. "Bob, you've got it. That has to be the answer, doesn't it, Jupe?"

Jupiter nodded. "Yes," he said. "Remarkable deduction, Bob. I'm just remembering a story I once read. It's a mystery story by a man named Robert Barr. In it a character named Lord Chizelrigg hides a lot of gold beating it into goldleaf and pasting it under

some wallpaper. The principle is the same. Only Spike Neely used paper money, which is much easier to handle."

"But wait a minute!" Bob put in. "Mrs. Miller said Spike Neely went out and finished a job for Mr Miller. Maybe he hid the money there."

"I don't think so." Jupiter shook his head. "The best place would be— Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh! what?" Pete asked. "What're you oh-ing about, Jupe?"

"Spike tells us! That is, he told Gulliver. Right in the letter. Look at it!" Jupiter handed the letter over to Bob and Pete.

"See what he starts off by saying. *I may last five days, or three weeks, or even two months.*' Take those numbers and put them together. They make 532. What does that remind you of?"

"That was the number of Mrs Miller's house!" Bob shouted. "532 Danville Street."

"Right," Jupiter said. "And look here. He tells Gulliver, '*If you're ever in Chicago, look up my cousin Danny Street.*'"

"Danny could be a nickname for Danville!" Pete exclaimed.

"Right!" Jupe agreed. "That mention of a cousin and Chicago is just put in to distract attention from the words *Danny Street*. As near as he dared say it Spike Neely was telling Gulliver that the money was hidden at 532 Danville Street."

"Under the wallpaper!" Bob chimed in. "He didn't dare say too much, but that was very tricky, putting one stamp under another!"

"We've solved the riddle," Pete said, jubilant. Then he looked thoughtful. "Now how do we find the money?"

"If it's underneath somebody's wallpaper, we can't

just barge in and say, 'Excuse us, we have to rip your wallpaper off.' " Bob remarked.

"No," Jupiter agreed. "That's a job for the police. We'll have to tell Chief Reynolds. It's no use trying to tell Lieutenant Carter—he made it plain he doesn't want us bothering him. Tomorrow, though, or Monday, when the Chief is back—"

The ringing of the telephone interrupted him. Startled, Jupiter picked it up.

"Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking," he said.

"Good!" answered a man's authoritative voice. "This is George Grant speaking."

"George Grant?" Jupiter frowned. The name was unfamiliar to him.

"That's right. Chief Reynolds told you I'd be getting in touch with you, didn't he?"

"Why, no," Jupiter said, puzzled. "He didn't mention you, Mr Grant."

"He must have forgotten," the man said. "It was he who gave me your telephone number. I'm a special agent for the Bankers' Protective Association. I've been keeping an eye on you since I read in the paper about your buying that trunk of *The Great Gulliver's*. And—"

"Yes?" Jupiter asked, a bit uneasily, as the man paused.

"Do you boys know that three of the worst thugs in California are watching you day and night?"

Disturbing News

"W-WATCHING US?" Jupiter's voice quavered slightly. Pete and Bob gulped.

"They certainly are. Watching you and following you. Their names are Three-Finger Munger, Baby-faced Benson, and Leo the Knife. They were in prison with Spike Neely, and they're hoping that you'll lead them to the money he hid before he was caught."

"We—we haven't seen anyone watching us, Mr. Grant."

"Of course not. These men are professional. They've rented a house down from the road from the salvage yard and are watching it through field glasses. If you go anywhere, they follow you."

"We'd better tell the police," Jupiter said, alarmed. Bob and Pete, listening to the little loudspeaker, nodded hard.

"I've already told Chief Reynolds," Mr. Grant said. "He offered to chase them away, but said he couldn't arrest them because watching you isn't illegal. They haven't actually done anything—yet."

"Chief Reynolds was afraid some criminal might think we knew where the missing money is," Jupiter said, none too happily. "I guess that's why they're watching us. To see if we go get it."

"I hope you don't try," Mr. Grant said. "No telling what Three-Fingers and the others might attempt."

you actually have any clue, take my advice and turn it over to the police."

"But we haven't," Jupiter said. "That is, we didn't have."

"But you do now?" Mr Grant asked.

"Well—yes," Jupiter admitted. "We just found a clue that seems significant."

"Good work!" the man said heartily. "Take it right down to Chief Reynolds. I'll meet you there and we'll all have a confab . . . Uh-oh, that won't work. I just remembered that the Chief is out of town today."

"That's right," Jupiter agreed. "We tried to telephone him. Lieutenant Carter is taking his place. The Lieutenant wouldn't even listen to us."

"And if you did go to him now, he'd probably take all the credit and keep you from getting the reward," Mr Grant said thoughtfully.

"Reward?" Jupiter asked. Bob and Pete looked excitedly at each other.

"The Bankers' Protective Association has offered a ten per cent reward to anyone who can locate the missing money. That's five thousand dollars that you'd be entitled to. That is, if your clue is a good one."

"Five thousand dollars!" Pete whispered to Jupe. "That idea I like! Ask him how we can win it."

"I have an idea," Grant continued. "If you lay your information before the Bankers' Protective Association directly and we pass it on to the police, you're in line for the reward. It's on record that you supplied the clue. I could come to see you and—No, that's not a good idea."

"If those thugs saw me, they'd probably recognize me, and they might make some desperate move. Suppose you come to see me, secretly. I'm in town now."

"I can't leave the salvage yard," Jupiter answered,

scowling. "I'm supposed to be in charge here. My aunt and uncle won't be back for an hour or two."

"Hmm—I see." Mr Grant was silent for a moment. "Do you think you can slip away later this evening, after you close? All three of you meet me somewhere? You'd have to get away without Three-Finger and the others seeing you go."

"I believe I could do that, sir," Jupiter agreed. "Of course, Bob and Pete have to leave soon to go home for dinner. Do you think they'll be followed?"

"I doubt it. You're the one the crooks are interested in. You're sure you can slip away without being seen?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sure I can," said Jupiter, thinking of Red Gate Rover, the boys' secret exit in the back fence of the yard. "It'll be late, though, because today is Saturday and the yard is open until seven o'clock."

"Excellent. Will eight o'clock be all right then?"

"Yes, Mr Grant, I think so."

"Then suppose we meet in the park—Oceanview Park. I'll be sitting on a bench inside the east entrance, reading a newspaper. I'll have on a brown sports jacket and a brown snap-brim hat. You three get there separately, making sure you're not being followed. That clear?"

"Yes, sir," Jupiter said.

"And don't breathe a word to anyone before we meet. It's important that nothing leaks out until I have your statement. Bring your clues with you. Check?"

"All clear, Mr Grant," Jupiter agreed.

"Then I'll see you at eight. Good-bye until then."

As Jupiter hung up, Pete let out a suppressed exclamation.

"Wow! A five-thousand-dollar reward. What's the matter, Jupe, why don't you look happy?"

"We haven't found the money yet," Jupiter said.

Bob Springs a Bombshell

BURSTING with some new information, Bob pedaled furiously through the back streets of Rocky Beach heading in a roundabout way for the meeting place in the park. He was a little late. He had taken time after dinner to look through a pile of old newspapers in the garage. He had found the special item he wanted, and now he was trying to make up for lost time. But when he got to the east entrance to the park he saw that Pete and Jupiter were ahead of him. They were seated on a bench with a young, well-dressed man, talking earnestly. They looked up as Bob approached, his bicycle brakes squealing.

"Sorry I'm late," Bob said, puffing. "I had to hunt for something."

"You have to be Bob Andrews," the man said pleasantly. "I'm George Grant." They shook hands and the young man extended a wallet, open to show an engraved card behind a plastic window. "Here's my identification, Bob. Just to be formal."

The card said that George Grant was an accredited investigator for the Bankers' Protective Association. Bob nodded and Mr Grant put it away.

"Jupe—" Bob started to say, but Jupiter spoke first.

"We've just been telling Mr Grant what we learned from the letter, about the money being hidden under the wallpaper in Mrs Miller's old house."

"You boys have done a fine job," Mr Grant said.

"The Bankers' Protective Association will be glad to see that you get the reward. If the money is pasted under the wallpaper, it's no wonder the police didn't find it when they searched the house.

"However, we have a little problem. The house is undoubtedly occupied. It'll take special police authority to enter it and rip off the wallpaper. I'm not sure—"

Bob was unable to hold back his news any longer.

"That's just it, Mr Grant," he burst out. "If the house is still standing, it isn't occupied, and it won't be standing much longer!"

The others looked at him in amazement. He hurried on to explain.

"When I went back to the library to get my jacket, I heard a woman telling the librarian about having to get out of her house on Maple Street, and her trouble finding a new place. She finally moved down here to Rocky Beach. I asked the librarian about it and she told me there had been a piece in the paper last week. I looked it up in the copy at the library. Then I found the paper at home and cut out the story. Here it is!"

He thrust a folded piece of newspaper into Jupiter's hand. Jupiter unfolded it, and he and Mr Grant and Pete all read it swiftly.

DEMOLITION BEGINS FOR NEW FREEWAY

More than 300 homes, some of them new and attractive, stand empty and silent today, awaiting the bulldozers of the wreckers. Soon they will be only memories to the residents who have had to move out of them, to make way for the freeway extension that will rise in their place.

A fifteen-block length of Maple Street will vanish to be replaced by a six-lane freeway de-

signed to speed the ever-increasing load of traffic through Los Angeles. Not only Maple Street will be affected, but nearby houses on the cross streets will also go.

The heartbreak to the residents who have had to move from their homes is new to them, but it is only a repetition of thousands of similar cases since the freeway programme in this city began. The urgent need to keep the traffic flowing through the city has meant the destruction of many thousands of homes to make way for the freeways.

There was more to the story, but Mr Grant, having read that much, whistled softly.

"Maple Street!" he said. "That's where you said Mrs Miller's house was moved to four years ago, Peter."

"That's what the apartment house superintendent told me," Jupiter answered.

"And now most of Maple Street is going to be demolished," Mr Grant said. "That changes things. That means the house is empty. It means we have no time to delay. Why, Three-Finger and the others could be there now. They may have already been there and found the money!"

"How could that be, Mr Grant?" Pete asked.

"They followed you boys yesterday," Mr Grant said. "They must have followed you to Mrs Miller's present home and deduced you were getting information from her. Then they undoubtedly followed you to the apartment house. They could easily have learned what the superintendent told you. They may have deduced that you think the money is in the house. They could be looking for it now!"

"Gosh, that's right!" Bob exclaimed. "Maybe we're too late!"

"Ordinarily I'd call on the police for help," Mr Grant said. "But time is short and I think the only thing to do is to make a bee-line for Maple Street and try to locate the house, and see if we can rescue the money immediately. No time to get in touch with the police. You boys can come with me—in fact, I need you, because you have an idea of what Mrs Miller's former house looks like and I don't."

"That's fine, Mr. Grant," Jupiter said. "But how will we go?"

"I have a car parked around the corner. We'll go in that. You can leave your bikes here and we'll pick them up later."

Wasting no time, Pete and Bob locked their bicycles. Jupiter had walked, after slipping out of the salvage yard through Red Gate Rover. Mr Grant led them to his car, a black station wagon, and a moment later they were off. Mr. Grant headed for Hollywood by a back route over the hills.

"You're sure the money is hidden under the wallpaper?" he asked Jupiter as they sped along.

"I'm almost positive," Jupiter said. "Mrs Miller told us that while Spike Neely was staying with her, he did some papering and painting. He could have pasted the bills up and put wallpaper over them then."

"Then, when he was in the hospital, he sneaked the address of the house into his letter. But he couldn't think of any way to tell Gulliver about the hiding place except by pasting one stamp under the other."

"Paper under paper," Mr Grant nodded. "It figures. If we locate the money, we'll have to get some equipment to steam the wallpaper off. Luckily, this is Saturday and some of the stores are open late. But first we have to find it—and find it first!"

He kept the station wagon moving at high speed until they reach a built-up district, then he slowed down.

"Now let's see that city map in the glove compartment," he told Jupiter. He came to a stop as Jupiter found the map and gave it to him. He studied the map for a moment.

"Good," he said. "We can go straight ahead until we come to Houston Avenue, then cut across on it to Maple Street. You said the five-hundred block?"

"Either that or the six-hundred block, the superintendent thought," Jupiter told him.

"We'll find it," Mr Grant said grimly. "Lucky we still have some daylight left."

The daylight was fading fast, however, by the time they came to Houston Avenue. Mr Grant turned left, and they proceeded for some thirty or forty blocks until they reached Maple Street.

Even though no street signs were still up, they had trouble telling that it was the right street. Their way was almost blocked by a mass of wreckage. The houses on one corner were already down, mere heaps of rubble waiting to be carted away. Down the blocks on their left they could see that the houses were already gone. Two huge cranes with clam buckets, which could chew up the wooden houses with their diesel-powered jaws, were parked in an open space, together with several bulldozers. A building that once had been a restaurant stood forlornly on the corner beside them. They stopped to survey the scene. Already the cranes had taken a couple of bites out of the front. It looked as if it had been bombed.

"Wow!" Pete voiced their thoughts. "It sure is a mess. Do you think we're in time, Mr Grant?"

"Just barely," the investigator said grimly. "If I

have it figured right, the five- and six-hundred blocks are a couple of streets up to right. Let's see."

He eased the car around the rubble and turned right. In a moment they were going past houses that had not yet been torn down, but stood silent, and dark, with no sign of life in them.

Only a few hundred feet away was the busy city, but here on Maple Street was an eerie quality of desertion. The people had all gone. In a few months a concrete freeway would run through here, carrying thousands of cars. But now they had the street to themselves, except for a skinny cat that ran across the road.

"The nine-hundred block," Mr Grant said with satisfaction. "We'll be in the six-hundred block in no time. Keep a sharp eye out for the house."

They drove slowly along, past the silent houses. Here and there a door swung open, as if to say it no longer mattered whether doors were shut or not.

"Six-hundred block," Mr Grant announced tensely. "See anything?"

"There it is!" Pete almost shouted, pointing to a neat bungalow halfway down the block.

"There's another one that looks almost like it," Jupiter put in, pointing to the other side of the street. "Both have round windows up in the attic storage space."

"Two of them, eh?" Mr Grant frowned. "And you don't know which is the right one?"

"Mrs Miller just said it was a one-storey bungalow with brown shingles and a round window in the attic."

"It's a common type of house here," Mr Grant muttered. "Let's keep going. We'll survey the next block."

In the next block they spotted another brown-shingled bungalow, standing between two stuccoed

homes. This one also had a round upper window. Mr Grant brought the car to a halt.

"Three possibilities," he said. "That makes it harder. But we seem to be here first. I don't see any cars parked on this street, nor any sign that Three-Finger and the others have beaten us to it. We'll park on a side street so we won't be conspicuous, and then we'll just have to investigate three houses until we find the right one."

The Search Begins

IT WAS ALMOST DARK as they approached the first of the brown-shingled bungalows. Mr Grant cast a quick look up and down the block. No one was in sight on silent, deserted Maple Street.

He tried the door. It wouldn't open.

"Locked," he said. "But as it's going to be torn down, we don't have to be careful how we get in."

He took a small crowbar he had carried from the car and inserted the thin end between the front door and the door jamb. As he pressed, wood splintered and the door sprang open.

He entered, with The Three Investigators at his heels. Inside it was quite dark. Mr Grant flashed a light on a wall. They were in a dusty room with a few papers littering the floor. It was apparently the living room.

"We might as well start here," he said. "Though I'd expect the hiding place to be in a back room or maybe the hall. Got a knife, Jupiter?"

Jupiter brought out his prized Swiss knife and opened the big blade. He made a cut in the flowered wallpaper on the nearest wall. Mr Grant eased the edge of a putty knife into the cut and turned back a strip of the paper. Underneath was only plaster.

"Not here," he said. "We'll have to try different spots on this wall, then the other walls, then go to the other rooms."

rushed into the living room. Bob found himself breathing fast with excitement. Now, for sure, they were right. Somewhere in this house fifty thousand dollars were pasted beneath the wallpaper.

"Give us some light, Jupiter," Mr Grant said. Jupiter flashed the light on each wall in turn. The room was papered in a heavy raised design.

"It could easily be in here," the man said. "Rough wallpaper—easy to hide bills underneath it. Let's get to work."

Jupiter quickly made a cut and Mr Grant turned the paper back. Underneath was only the plaster wall.

"We'll start near the corner and work our way right round the room," Mr Grant said. "Fifty thousand dollars in large bills wouldn't take up a whole wall. Let's make it snappy."

He and Jupiter had finished the first wall and started on the second, with Pete and Bob pressing close to watch, when a sudden noise made them freeze.

"What—" Mr Grant began. He never finished the sentence. The front door was flung open and heavy feet came into the room with a rush. The beam of a large flashlight centred on the little group. And from behind the flashlight an ugly voice growled:

"All right, all of you! Put up your hands!"

Where Is the Money?

THEY ALL TURNED, putting up their hands. The strong beam of light made them blink and squint and prevented them from seeing who was behind it.

"If you're the police," Mr Grant started to say, "I'm George Grant, special investigator for—"

A brash laugh cut him short.

"George Grant! That's a good one. Is that what you told the kids?"

Jupiter blinked. A sudden sick realization came to him.

"Isn't he Mr Grant from the Bankers' Protective Association?" he asked.

"Him?" The deep, grating voice laughed again. "That's Smooth Simpson, one of the slickest cons in the business."

"But he has an official card," Pete protested.

"Sure he has. Printed special for him. He has a million of 'em. Don't feel bad if he fooled you. He's fooled the cops themselves, plenty of times.

"Thought you could grab the cash right under our noses, didn't you, Smooth? But when the fat kid went into that junkyard and didn't come out again even when they closed, we knew something was up. We knew the house had to be over here someplace—got the info from the super of that apartment house after Fatty did yesterday—so we came here in a hurry. Spotted your light when you came into this house. Now we're here and we'll just take charge."

"You're Three-Finger Munger, aren't you?" Mr Grant—or Smooth Simpson—said. "Listen, Three-Finger, why don't we all join forces? We haven't actually found the money yet, and I can help—"

"Shut up!" the man with the flashlight growled. "We'll find the money ourselves and leave you for the cops. Teach you not to try to pull a fast one on us. Now all of you turn around, face the wall. Put your hands behind your backs. No false moves or you'll regret it!"

"Lea and Baby-Face, you got the ropes. Tie 'em up good."

With sinking hearts, The Three Investigators obeyed the orders. They realized now that they had been completely fooled by the slick criminal nick-named Smooth. All his talk about Chief Reynolds had lulled any suspicion they might otherwise have had. He must have learned that the Chief was out of town for the day, and had then called The Three Investigators in a bold effort to trick them into telling anything they might know. And no wonder he had found excuses all along for not going to the police!

Mentally, Jupiter kicked himself for not suspecting something. But it had all been so plausible! Smooth was just that—smooth. No doubt he had read about the trunk in the newspaper, and knowing the story of the missing bank-robbery loot and Spike Neely's letter through underworld gossip, had started checking on Jupiter and the others. He could easily have obtained Jupiter's telephone number from the phone book.

Three-Finger and his men had been following The Three Investigators, and Smooth Simpson had been following all of them!

But it was too late for any regrets. Deft hands were tying the boys' wrists behind their backs.

Moments later they were ordered to sit on the floor,

and then their ankles were lashed together. When they were helpless, Three-Finger Munger chuckled.

"Now you look real pretty," he taunted them. "I won't gag you because there's nobody around to hear you if you yell. Anyway, if you act up, we'll clip you one on the head. Don't worry, someone will find you on Monday when work starts again. That is, I hope they'll find you before the bull-dozers start knocking this house down."

He chuckled again. Now Jupiter and his companions could see that Three-Finger Munger was a big man; his two associates were smaller. They could not see the faces of any of them clearly.

"Now let's see where we stand," Three-Finger said. He shone his light on the wall where Jupiter and Smooth had been working. "Looking for the money under the wallpaper, were you? That's a smart hiding place—never would have thought of it. Did the kid figure it out for you, Smooth?"

"Yes, he did," Smooth Simpson admitted. "The clue was on that letter sent to Gulliver. It was in the trunk all along."

"I figured it had to be," Three-Finger said. "That's why we wanted to get our hands on the trunk. My boys got it, too, from that tall thin guy. Only somebody followed 'em and jumped 'em at the hideout and got it away before we could open it. Was that you, Smooth?"

"Not me," the man on the floor said. "I didn't know anything about that."

"Funny," Three-Finger muttered. "I wonder who it could have been. It certainly wasn't these kids."

"It was four or five guys with handkerchiefs over their faces," one of the other two said, speaking for the first time. "They were fast and tough. Laid us out before we knew what hit us."

"Wonder who it was?" Three-Finger grunted. "Maybe some other mob after the money. Well, the trunk didn't do them any good or they'd have been here before this. But we can't stand here talking. Let you and Baby-Face see what's under the wallpaper in the rest of the rooms."

The four captives on the floor watched silently as the two men swiftly slashed open the wallpaper on the remaining walls. Concerned as he was at their predicament, Jupiter could not help wondering who had seized Gulliver's trunk from these men and sent it back to him. But no answer to the riddle came to him. Meanwhile, Three-Finger's henchmen failed to find anything underneath the living room wallpaper.

"Not in this room, then," Three-Finger said. "Smooth, if you know which room it's in, better tell us. If you do, maybe we'll untie you when we're finished."

"If I knew I'd have gone straight for it," Smooth Simpson said. "But untie me and I'll help you find it."

"Not a chance," Three-Finger snapped. "You tried to grab the money from us and now you can pay for it. Come on, fellows, we'll try the bedrooms."

The three thugs moved back to the first bedroom and left the four captives in darkness. The Three Investigators could hear them ripping at the wallpaper and cursing at their lack of success.

"Boys, I'm sorry this had to happen," Smooth Simpson said in a low tone. "I admit I tried to put the fast one over on you, but I didn't plan any violence. That's not how I work. I use brains, not force."

"It's my fault," Jupiter said, sounding unhappy. "I should have suspected you."

"Don't take it so hard," the man advised him. "I've fooled the best there are."

After that there was silence, except for the sound

from the rear of the house where Three-Finger and his companions were at work. Then all four captives stiffened.

The front door opened, creaking slightly!

Alertly, they all listened. Very faintly they could see the dark form of a rather small man ease into the room.

"Who's there?" Smooth demanded, keeping his voice to a whisper.

"Quiet!" came back an answering whisper. "We come to help. Don't let the others suspect anything."

Another man slipped in through the door, and a third. Still others followed. They could not be sure how many because of the darkness. The intruders were very skilful and made almost no noise.

"Men!" said the voice of the first. "Stay close to the walls, near the door. When they come out, get the bags over their heads and tie them up. No knives! Don't hurt them if you can help it."

A muffled grunt of understanding answered him.

Jupiter, Bob, and Pete waited with rising hope as well as bewilderment. Who could the men in the room be? They weren't the police, or they would have stormed in with lights and guns. Were they real friends? Or were they some other gang also after the hidden money?

Now the sound of angry voices from the rear indicated that Three-Finger and the others had failed to find the money. Their footsteps came down the hall into the dark living room. Three-Finger entered first, turning on a light on the floor.

"All right, you fat kid!" he snarled at Jupiter. "We're through fooling. You tell us where that money is or else!"

Struggle in the Darkness

SUDDENLY Three-Finger was overwhelmed by the dark forms. Others grabbed the man behind him and pulled him into the room. The third man tried to escape but footsteps pounded after him and his cries and shouts indicated that he had been caught.

Meanwhile in the living room a terrific struggle followed. Three-Finger dropped his flashlight to the floor where it rolled around, kicked by many feet, and only brief glimpses of the combat.

The Three Investigators could see that there was a struggle over Three-Finger's head. Exerting his strength to the utmost, he threw off a couple of his attackers. Two others leaped on him. He fell to the floor with a cry and his companion fell on top of him. They kicked and thrashed about wildly.

"Quickly! Tie their hands and feet. Then get them out!" ordered a voice.

For a moment longer the fight continued furiously. Then Three-Finger and the others were overpowered and bound. Three-Finger began uttering vile threats, but these were stilled as a gag was forced into his mouth. In a moment he and the others lay stretched out on the floor, helpless. The only sound was the heavy breathing of the men who had captured the criminals.

"Very good," said a friendly voice. "Wait outside until we untie the boys."

The other men slipped quietly out the door. Then

one inside. This one turned on his flashlight and
e it on the boys for a moment.
Good." He chuckled. "No one fell on you and
shed you flat. Now I set you free."

le placed the light on the floor so it would illumin-
the boys without shining in their eyes. Then he
proached with a long knife. As he got closer, Bob
d Pete saw a swarthy man with a fierce moustache,
nom they had never seen before. But Jupiter recog-
zed him.

"Lonzo!" he exclaimed. "The Gypsy from Zelda's
ouse!"

Lonzo chuckled again as he cut the ropes that
ound them.

"Yes," he said. "We meet once more."

"But—but how did you get here?" Jupiter asked
in bewilderment as he stood up, rubbing his wrists.

"No time for talk now," the Gypsy said. "Where is
the other one?"

He shone the light where Smooth Simpson had been.
Smooth was missing. Two ropes lay on the floor.

"He got away!" Bob exclaimed. "He must have
been quietly getting his hands free all along, and in the
fight slipped out!"

"He'll be far away by now," Lonzo said briefly. "It
matter. We have three for the police. Now come on
side. Zelda wishes to speak to you."

Zelda! The Gypsy fortune-teller! Jupiter followed
Lonzo out the door, with Bob and Pete at his heels.
Three old cars were parked at the kerb. The two
the rear seemed to be crowded with men—Gypsies.
the front car a woman waited.

It was Zelda. She was not wearing Gypsy clothes,
perhaps to avoid attracting attention.

"They are all right, Zelda," Lonzo reported. "The
are tied up inside. One got away."

"No matter," Zelda said quietly. "Get in the boys, we must talk."

The three squeezed in with her. Lonzo remained watch.

"So our paths cross again, Jupiter Jones," Zelda said. "It was written in the stars and in the crystal am glad we got here in time."

"Were you following us?" Jupiter asked as thoughts began to clear.

"Yes," Zelda said. "Lonzo and some of the others were. Since first you visited me. The crystal said danger, and we wanted to prevent harm from coming to you. Lonzo followed those who followed you, and when they came here tonight, he sent for the rest of us to come to your aid. But we must be brief. You have found the money?"

"No," Jupiter sighed. "Apparently it isn't here. I was positive the money was hidden in Spike's sister's house. The letter practically said so. That's the place it would logically be."

"Gulliver was sure the letter from Spike gave a clue to the hiding place, but he could not solve it," Zelda said.

"Then you knew Gulliver?" Jupiter demanded.

"We are related," Zelda told him. "In an unusual way. I am anxious to clear his name and hoped that you, being very clever, could solve the mystery. Where did you look?"

"Under the wallpaper," Jupiter told her. "It's the place no one would think of. But it wasn't there."

"Why did you think it was?" Zelda asked.

"Well, Spike knew he couldn't actually say murder in a letter," Jupiter explained. "He knew it would be censored. So he did something quite tricky, yet that was the only thing he could do."

suspecting a great deal that previously had been mystery.

"You sent us that warning, Miss Zelda?" he asked.

The old Gypsy woman nodded.

"Indeed I did, boy. My Gypsies were keeping watch over you, but I wanted you to do your utmost to find the money—which you have. Now we must go. We will call the police, and the affair will be ended. You wait here for the police. They will take charge of the money and those crooks downstairs. The police will want to question us also, but they will not be able to find us. Not yet, at least."

"Wait, Zelda!" Jupiter said as the Gypsy woman and Lonzo turned to go. "Before you leave, I wish you would tell me something. About the trunk—how did it get back to us? And about the talking skull Socrates—did he really talk or——"

"Later, later," the woman said. "In two weeks visit me at the old address. We will then have returned. Your questions will be answered."

"But at least tell us about Gulliver," Jupiter urged. "Where is he?"

"I thought he was dead," Pete put in.

"I did not say so," Zelda replied. "I said he had vanished from the world of men. Now, perhaps he may return from the world where he has been. For two weeks—farewell."

With that, she and Lonzo hurried down the stairs and The Three Investigators heard the Gypsies' car roar away into the night. The three looked at each other, and Bob gave a sigh of relief.

"Wow!" he said. "We did it, Jupel! We found the missing money!"

"With some help from Zelda," Jupiter said. "I'm certainly looking forward to seeing her again. I have a hunch she can give me some very interesting answers!"

Alfred Hitchcock Asks Questions

ALFRED HITCHCOCK, the noted motion-picture producer, sat behind the desk in his office and looked through the many pages of notes regarding the mystery of the talking skull, which had been prepared by Bob Andrews. Then he glanced across to where The Three Investigators, in their best clothes, sat in a row and waited for him to speak.

"Excellent! done, kids," Alfred Hitchcock rumbled. "Jupiter, my boy, you did well to locate the missing money, after the authorities failed for so long."

But Jupiter's round features looked glum. "No, sir," he sighed. "I should have solved the secret sooner. First, I thought that one stamp being under the other meant the money was pasted under some wallpaper. I should have known better and looked for the other meaning. Then, if it hadn't been for some luck—"

"Luck helps those who are alert," Mr. Hitchcock said. "As I have reminded you before. You can't expect to get the right answer the very first time—no investigator manages that. In my opinion you did very well."

"Thank you, sir," Jupiter said. "I did find the missing money."

"And none for some time," Mr. Hitchcock said. "Two days later the money was found on the ground and the money was found on the ground."

Gulliver could listen in on our progress and plans. That way he knew pretty much everything we were doing. That made it a lot easier for him to keep an eye on us and come to our rescue in the end."

"All in all, a most interesting case," the director said. "Well, I will be glad to introduce it for you, as I have your others. Have you any idea what you'll work on next?"

"Not yet," Jupiter said as they all rose. "But we're keeping our eyes open. We'll be in touch with you, Mr Hitchcock."

They filed out of the office, and the director smiled to himself. A talking skull! What would they come up with next time!